

# Camas

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Volume 18  
Number 2 *Summer 2010*

Article 1

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Summer 2010

## Camas, Summer 2010

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et al.: Camas, Summer 2010

THE NATURE OF THE WEST

# Camas

Glacier Centennial Issue  
Summer 2010

Volume 18 Number 2 \$8.50

The University of Montana



# Will You Speak Before I Am Gone

Christopher Zumski Finke

I've read many times about the inspiration of the mountains and ice. It abounds in the tales of those who spend their lives in the true peaks of the world, and on the constant ice. Many, I am told, spend hours contemplating the massive, seeming immutability of the world of rock and glaciers, and are moved by the constancy of their world. A friend from Alaska has written beautifully of the compaction, the power, the impressed movement that moves so little. I have tried to understand this.

I have spent much of my life conceiving the meaning of God. In this, I am not alone. What can God mean? How can the notion of God possibly be understood in the mind of the mortal human? God is, if God is anything at all, eternal. But how can we know eternity? We die. Death is that which is certain; we cannot escape our own mortality. Yet I cannot help it. When I behold the glaciers of the world I sing with Walt Whitman, who loved all he saw: "Why should I wish to see God better than this day?"

I have seen glaciers, but only with my eyes. I cannot admit to knowing them; I am only a visitor in their world. Once in the Alps of France, my peers and I saw the high-altitude glaciers and glacial lakes that make up that particular part of this world. Likewise, I have seen the glaciers of Glacier National Park, first hand and in close proximity. I saw them as a child, and again as an adult, resting on the mountainside, cozy in the permanent relationship of rock and water. They evoked immovability, and they brought with them questions of God, and Time. Rock and glaciers are about as close as I have come to deep time, and eternity. In my mind, this sense of permanence makes peace in the world by outlasting our human efforts to disrupt peace. If God is, and if God is anything that words can describe, God must promote peace beyond our ability to undo it. These are the thoughts that swim in my brain as I behold the glaciers I have beheld.

But these are merely thoughts, and in reality are not so. The permanence, we are learning, is façade. The mountains, after all, were made by time,

by movement, and by pressure. These same forces, though indiscernible to my eyes, work at every second of every day to unmake the mountains. The mountains are mortal, too. They will outlast me, but they will go. From a certain view, the mountains are even more mortal than we are. We require the complications of failing organs, the firing of weapons, the crashing of our vehicles, to perish. We are filled with uncertainty and doubt, by the knowledge that we will, in the end, die. Because we do not know how or where it will happen, or even why, we are filled with anguish. I am, anyway. Mountains simply wait out friction.

So too, glaciers. We know they are on the decline. Everywhere the reportage of melting glaciers fills our newspapers and our television screens. But the end of glaciers is not like the end of mountains. The difference is great, for we are the cause of glacial demise, and we can only dream of a solution. In this country, we burn the coal that kills the glaciers. In India, and Peru, and Switzerland, we drive the cars and release the gases that are responsible for the slow death of our icons of the everlasting. Many wish it was not so, and deny that such occurrences are taking place. But in our hearts I think we know it is true. Maybe we are just ashamed to admit that we have found a way to destroy our model for the eternity that we so hope holds our God.

In the years to come, I will return to Glacier National Park. I will see the same things there I saw last time, the lakes, the trees, the mountainous peaks and the glaciers they hold. I presume, to my eyes, they will look much the same, for the death of glaciers is slow, and the death of the mountains they rest upon is even, amazingly, slower. My mind will return to the same questions of eternity, of God and the immutable. It makes me wonder, as the glaciers are melting, is our notion of eternity melting too? Have we finally found a way to dissolve our God into dew? The glaciers are asking you, as Walt Whitman asked you: "Will you speak before I am gone? Will you prove, already, too late?" •







# Volume 18 Number 2

# Art & Photography

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Printed by UM Printing and Graphic Services.  
Library of Congress: ISSN 1092-5198

**Our Title** • *Camas* takes its name from the plant *camassia quamash*, which is celebrated as a staple of sustenance by Native American tribes from the Rocky Mountains to the Cascades. Care of the wild camas fields passed from generation to generation, even as the shape of the West changed with time and temperament.

**Our Vision** • Across the landscape of its pages, *Camas* the magazine cultivates new ideas and perspectives while remaining rooted in the inherited traditions of art and literature within the promise of the American West.

**Our Friends** • *Camas* received generous support for this issue from the Associated Students of the University of Montana, The Environmental Studies Program, Humanities Montana, The Glacier Centennial Organization, and many generous individuals and businesses.



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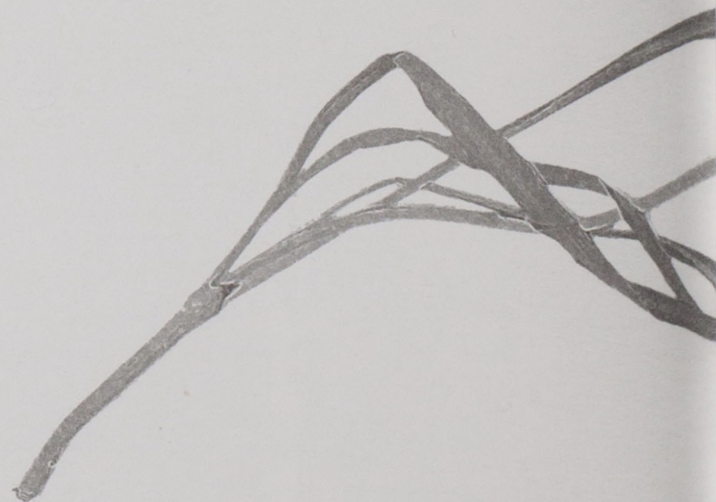
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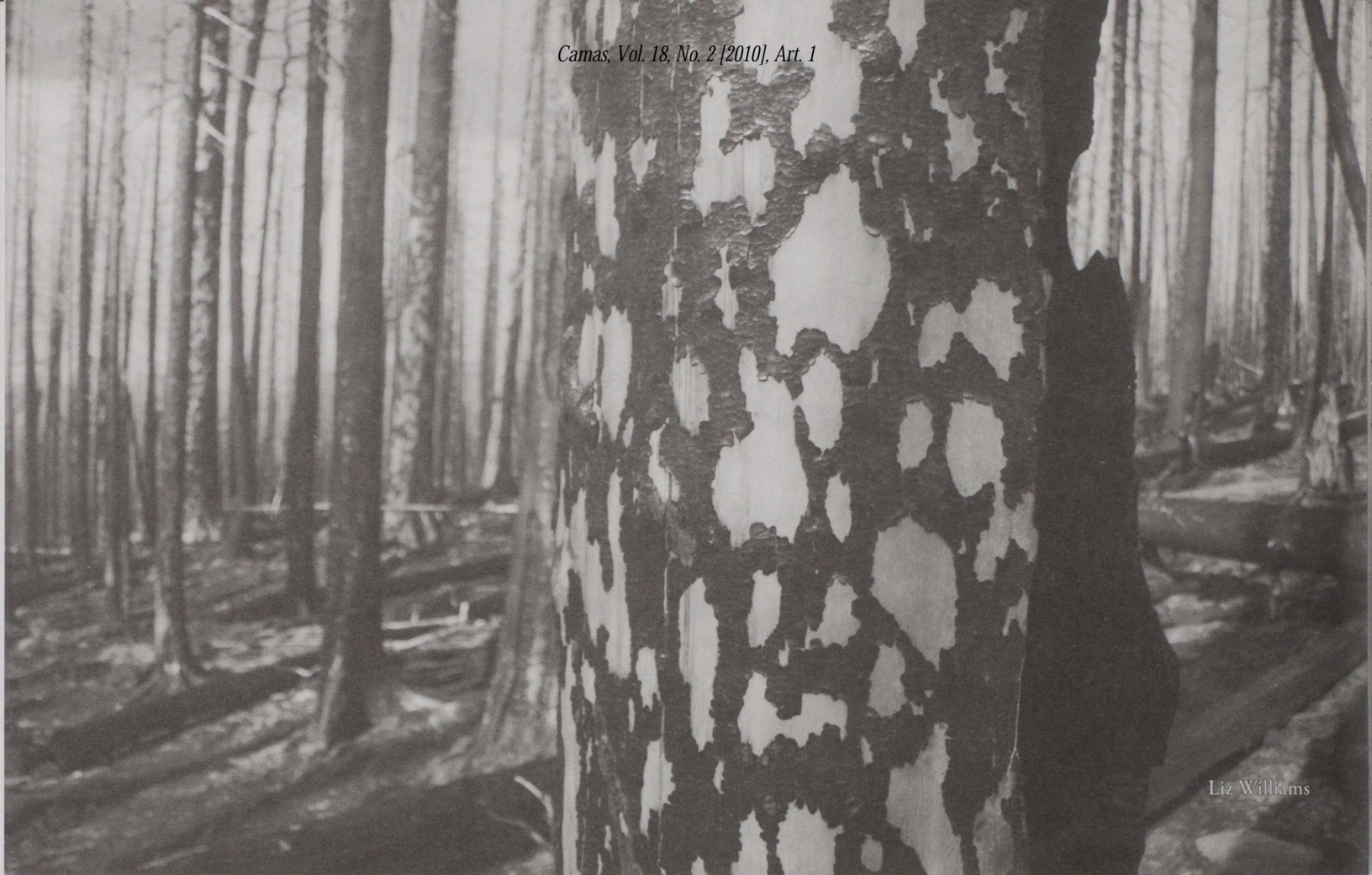
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Liz Williams

## From the Editors

Bethany Taylor & Russ Van Paepeghem

A couple of issues back, in speaking of the West, our editors said “to do justice to this region, it is imperative to tell the truth.”

We agree—especially when speaking of areas like Glacier National Park, to which this issue is dedicated. The story of Glacier is a synthesis of the story of the West.

We agree because the experiences we have in the enclaves of our own making—parks, wilderness areas, refuges, you name it—are the experiences we take as strength. We need them in order to carry on. And so we must speak the truth of these places if we mean to be honest with each other, if we mean to be good artists, if we mean to be sustained at all. Speaking the truth is not easy, and neither is collecting the important bits of these vocalizations, as we find here in this issue.

Some here will say the world is melting. Others that it doesn't much matter—we've always been melting, since we first began. In either case, we are at once limited and boundless. The witness of the artist is vital, since it is the artist that touches the places that give us strength, so as to telegraph that strength to the rest. In this way, whether poem, prose, or photograph, what these pages have to say is illuminating and nourishing.

We expect you'll take these pieces of art as strength, that you'll collect a tangible hope from them, that you'll see them as not just the truth of this region, but also as the promise of a future where strength radiates from everything we see.



# Contributors

**Erica Bloom** lives in Missoula, MT, where she writes and attends school. She is currently working on a project that looks at women's involvement in the anti-toxic movement.

**Grace Brogan** is a writer, maker, and grower. Her passion for drawing attention toward one's part in the complicated system of relationships in which we live has brought her into the employ of several amazing organizations and institutions. She hopes to handbuild a life of learning, sharing, and making change.

**Tony Bynum** is a full-time nature, wildlife, adventure and fine art photographer. His images are of wild animals and wild places and the people who make the outdoors part of their lives. One of his images is featured on the cover of the Glacier National Park Centennial book by C.W. Guthrie of Missoula, MT, titled, *The First 100 Years*. Tony also operates Glacier Impressions gallery in the tiny village of East Glacier Park, MT, where he and his 8 year-old daughter make their home.

After earning a M.S. in wildlife biology from UM in 1974, **Douglas H. Chadwick** studied mountain goats in Glacier National Park. He has since written hundreds of articles and 11 books on natural history and conservation around the globe. *The Wolverine Way* is the result of years of volunteer work for the Glacier Wolverine Project, helping catch and radio-track these wildest of wild carnivores along the continent's crown.

**Bob Friend** holds Bachelors and Masters degrees in journalism. His personal interests include photography, writing, bicycling, hiking, cross-country skiing, home projects, guitar and travel. Bob and his wife Kerstin live in Wauconda Township, IL. Bob has been hiking in and photographing Glacier National Park since the late 1980s, most recently in August 2009 when this photograph was taken.

**Beth Gibson** is an Environmental Studies Graduate Student at the University of Montana.

**M Jackson** is a Masters of Environmental Studies candidate at the University of Montana. She calls Southeast Alaska and a farm in Washington State home. She can be contacted at: [mlejackson@gmail.com](mailto:mlejackson@gmail.com)

After visiting the Rockies three years ago and being awed and inspired by their beauty, **Sara Mintz** moved to Missoula and spent a lot of time poking around the area taking photographs. Now enrolled in graduate school at the University of Montana, she's unfortunately too busy to go out and take pictures as often as she'd like.

Although she greatly misses both her recently abandoned role as an itinerant field biologist and her family back home in Wisconsin, **Beth Raboin** now makes herself content as a graduate student in the Environmental Studies Program at the University of Montana.

**Elizabeth Ruff** was born and raised in Alaska and developed an early love for the outdoors, adventure and travel. At a young age she also became very fond of photography. She would set up her stuffed animals for portrait practice with her Kodak 110 camera. It is only natural that her interests would eventually combine, and she would eventually move onto real animals and to the amazing landscape she calls home.

**Brian Schott** is a freelance writer and the founding editor of *Whitefish Review*, a literary journal that features the writing, art and photography of mountain culture. His most recent fiction has appeared in *Big Sky Journal*. As a freelance travel and outdoor writer, his award-winning stories have been featured in *The Boston Sunday Globe*, *National Geographic Traveler*, *Ski Magazine*, *Skiing Magazine*, *New York Post*, *New York Daily News*, and *New Hampshire Sunday News*. His photography has appeared in national publications like *USA Today* and *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*.

**Elaine Dugas Shea** has lived in Montana for 38 years - enjoying a career in social justice, working in Civil Rights, and serving American Indian Tribes. Her writing was featured in *Third Wednesday*, *South Dakota Review*, *Front Range*, *The Light in Ordinary Things*, *Hope Whispers*, *Samsara*, and the upcoming anthology *When Last on the Mountain: Essays, Stories and Poems from Writers Over 50*.

**Rebecca Solnit** is a writer, historian, and activist who can see Mount Tamalpais and the tip of the Golden Gate Bridge out her northwest window, or nearer at hand, asphalt, traffic, trees, a Gospel church, and a lot of power lines. The product of the California public education system from kindergarten to graduate school, she is the author of a dozen books and most recently a visiting writer at the University of Montana, where she had hoped for more snow.

**Harrison Rutledge** is a graduate of the University of Montana, Missoula, earning a B.A. in English and Creative Writing with a minor in Native American studies. At UM, he studied under poets Greg Pape, Prageeta Sharma, and Brian Blanchfield. He is now pursuing an M.A. in English at Montana State University, Bozeman.

**Sarah Weatherby** is a student in the Environmental Studies program at the University of Montana. She likes taking pictures.

**Rick White** has written for *The Onion* and *Westword*. He will receive an M.S. in Environmental Studies from the University of Montana in May.

**Liz Williams** graduated with an M.S. in Environmental Studies from the University of Montana in 2008. She now lives in southern Oregon, where she teaches people about the importance of bird conservation, hikes, takes photos, and tries to write occasionally.

**Kathleen Yale** has spent the last few years exploring the East while editing at *Orion* magazine. This summer she finally returns to her beloved Glacier for another season of grizzly hair collection and getting dirty.

**Maya Jewell Zeller's** pieces in this issue are from a series of linked poems, each titled "The Rust Fish." Two more from the series will be in the next issue of *Blue Earth Review*, and other poems recently appear or are forthcoming in the anthologies *Floating Bridge Review* and *Poets of the American West* and the journals *Rattle*, *Pank*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, and *High Desert Journal*. Maya lives in Spokane, where she teaches English at Gonzaga University.

**Christopher Zumski Finke** moved to Missoula from St. Paul, Minnesota. He studied literature in the Midwest before coming to Montana with his wife to write and study the natural world.



# Through the Heart of It

Erica Bloom

"The Kootenai people have always been on this land," Vernon tells me and sits back on his brown leather chair. "For 10,000 generations we have wandered through this region, traveling with the seasons to hunt for buffalo." Though he speaks slowly I write frantically, careful not to miss the details of his stories, aware that these words will be spoken many more times this year in honor of the Glacier Park Centennial. It's early March and I've come to Elmo, Montana, today to listen to a man whose ancestral history weaves through Glacier like the roads that now cut through its forests. With a population of 150, by the time I realized I was in Elmo I had already passed through. The town sits on the banks of Flathead Lake. The front of the Kootenai Cultural Center building faces northeast, the direction of Glacier National Park. Vernon Finely, the language specialist for the Kootenai Cultural Committee, works in the carpeted trailer behind the Center. With his graying ponytail and warm smile he describes his job as a preservation of culture, a teacher of an endangered language. Though I know he's told the story of the Kootenai people's relationship with Glacier many times before, when I ask him today he takes a slow sip of coffee from his Starbucks mug and begins like it is the first time.

"This region is the only place in the world where the Kootenai language is spoken," Vernon tells me that because his language is an isolate, it indicates that the Kootenai have always been on this land and their creation story is testament to this. He continues, "In ancestral times a sea monster by the name of Yawunik killed many animals. A council was called by the chief animal, Natmuqin, to destroy the monster and a war party was formed. Natmuqin was so tall that when he stood up his head hit the sky. A chase proceeded down the Kootenai River, past Wasa, British Columbia, then to where the St. Mary's River empties into the Kootenai River. When they finally captured Yawunik, Natmuqin scattered his flesh in all directions forming the white, black and yellow people. He then reached down to the grass to wipe his bloody hands. Letting the blood fall to the ground he said, 'these will be the red people, they will remain here forever.' Natmuqin, in all his excitement, rose up and knocked himself dead on the ceiling of the sky. When he fell back to Earth his head became the geysers in Yellowstone Park, his feet fell in British Columbia, and his body the spine of the Rocky Mountains."

Vernon laughs at the image of a giant's brain bubbling up as geysers, but then becomes serious and says, "You see, this whole region is special to the Kootenai people, but the Europeans decided that the land of what is now Glacier was special, and so that part has become preserved." It's a sentiment felt by many tribal people; though this land is protected today as a park, people lived peacefully within it for generations.

Before the establishment of Glacier, native people used this land for food, homes, and spirituality; the land sustained them and they in turn sustained the land. In 1910 President Taft signed the bill to set aside Glacier as the 10th National Park. The tribes that inhabited the land, the Kootenai, the Salish, the Pend d'Oreille and the Blackfeet, were put on reservations to the west and east of the park and have lived in those places ever since. "We have become guests in our aboriginal homeland. We can show our tribal ID and get in for free, but we wait in line with the rest of the tourists." Vernon tells me this but quickly praises the current park administration for acknowledging the presence of tribal people. He says that Chas Cartwright, current Superintendent for Glacier, understands that the park has only existed for 100 years, while the Kootenai people have been here for 10,000 generations. In honor of the Centennial Commemoration the Park Service has plans to include native perspectives through movies, speakers and visitor center exhibitions.

"The place was preserved because of the visitors, not because of the spiritual presence of the Kootenai people. But what's important is the preservation, not the reason why." Vernon pauses and looks out his window where clouds roll low off the lake. For this time of the year the snow is lighter than normal, and the warming air hints at an early spring. Seventy miles north of here the snow in Glacier is beginning to melt, and the grizzlies are already awake from hibernation. Though the park is protected against logging and mining, the boundaries are powerless against the threat of global climate change. Since 1910 the park has lost most of its glaciers. In the next 20 years these large ice masses are expected to recede completely. One more piece of the park's history will be its glaciers.

Vernon turns back to me, his eyes are serious. "We appreciate the visitors. Without them this place would not be preserved. But to preserve the place they had to



put a strip of pavement right through the heart of it." The road represents this dichotomy in life, that preservation and destruction usually coexist. "My uncle always talked about looking for the humor in tragedy, because those things are always together." This irony, inherent in Vernon's words, extends further than the road. The Kootenai people's sacred places in the park, the sites for ritual dances, have now been converted to facilities for tourists: campgrounds, gift shops, and restaurants.

There is an understanding in the Kootenai culture that everything has a spirit—every bump on the land, every waterfall and every tree. The elders believe that if you seek the help of the spirits they will allow you to hear their spirit song. For 10,000 years the Kootenai people called on the spirits for guidance by dancing at what is now Apgar Village. Vernon says, "We call it 'the place where we danced,' and when we

to Glacier in January and perform our dance, and you know what the elders said? They said, there's a lot of snow out there." Vernon laughs at the irony of this. Now the elders dance in the Kootenai Cultural Center, appreciative for the outreach, but even more grateful for a heated building, something that Western technologies brought along with them.

"So what about your children? Do they see Glacier as their home too?" I ask Vernon.

"Many people in the younger generation do not view the world the way I described it. Many of our children don't know the language or our history. And without language you have no culture, no understanding of the landscape."

Vernon tells me that his own grandparents spoke fluent Kootenai and Salish, but that they did not teach him because they wanted him to be successful in the English speaking world. Now, as an adult, Vernon



Liz Williams

danced we heard the songs of the spirits who guided us towards health, food, and materials." As the Kootenai people wandered throughout this region, more and more spirits revealed themselves to individuals and helped humans survive. Over the generations a certain world view formed: that people are the last of all creation, and that because everything was here before us, we should carry ourselves as if everything is our older brother.

But when the Park became official, the administration told the people they could no longer dance there. However, over the years the park service began to recognize the importance of the Kootenai's connection to their sacred places. Vernon says, "Fifteen years ago the park superintendent said to me, 'we'll close the park so you can dance at Apgar' and I went back and told the elders, told them that we could go

spends his days cultivating the last of the Kootenai language, preserving a piece of his culture and in turn his original land. But despite the shift towards a more Western way of thinking in younger generations, many Kootenai people still maintain a strong connection with the land and the spirits that reside here.

Vernon knows that his culture is shifting, and has been for generations. But he also knows that the land that sustained his people will continue to exist because of the Park's protection. "The stands of Cedars at Avalanche Lake could hear my ancestors dancing at the lake long before they could envision Europeans coming. I tell my children there is nowhere you can go in this region that you will not step on soil made from the bones and bodies of my ancestors. That's the connection you have to this territory. Some of the blood that pumps through your body was there that first winter dancing." •



# Berry Soup

Elaine Dugas Shea

Agnas Little Wind  
Prays before going  
Up in the hills and  
Never sees bears, never  
Sees nothing. Sweet  
Pines hide from me, she says, knowing,

She picks serviceberries tonight  
By the park lodge, buckets-full,  
Shaking branchlets, inky-blue  
Stains on her thumb and finger-tips,

A matching kerchief is tied  
Under her chin  
While her friend  
Waits for her in the van.





# Kyi-Yo Traditional, Grass, Jingle Dress and Fancy

Elaine Dugas Shea

Wearing the lightest emotions; a prayer  
Offering in the double-hop,  
Kick and knee bend, bowed head and  
Body lift to the Great Spirit,  
Fanning out in the circle, toe taps,  
Turns side to side, breathes  
Deeply during Honor Beats  
From the Host Drum.

Blackfeet dancers sweep low to the ground,  
Young ones whose knees  
Still bend gracefully. Bi-focals and  
Bird feathers ride with dancers who  
Listen to the announcer  
Suggesting: Greet your neighbor,  
Strike up a romance and maybe,  
Borrow money.







Elizabeth Ruff

## Ice in Isolation, a lament

M Jackson

I became an iceberg, once. Just my head visible, floating atop a dark deep glacial pool. The rest of me isolated, sinking, freezing. My head—a tiny part of my entire bulk, grimly bobbing along, giving no hint of the full entirety of my body that remained underneath the surface. Just one small part of me left, uncommitted to the ice world.

I fought hard in that glacial pool. I tried to move my limbs, to keep circulation, to keep the numbness at bay. I believed I would not give up, that to embrace my metamorphosis from human to iceberg was a surrender, a white flag, an acquiescence for switching off the ears and mind.

Glaciers are malleable, flexible, elastic. They're neither hard nor hollow. They inhabit a deliquescent space somewhere in between. Areas of glacial ice exist so hard and compact there isn't room for even oxygen molecules. And then there are sections of ice under such immense pressure they've morphed into an ice

water lava substance akin to molten plastic—only cold.

Each glacier is extraordinary, unique, like people. Glaciers continually change, as if people. Some days the changes are in a single moment, others within a glacial lifetime. Glaciers are changelings.

A single glance at the surface of a glacier tells what's happening underneath, below, inside. If the surface is smooth, wide, there aren't any obstacles to overcome. But where the ice buckles, is rough and jagged, a wide field birthing crevasses and cuts—underneath there has been a disturbance, a stress, a sudden newness to the known topography. The stress might be a left or right flow around a mountain, a sudden uphill or downhill—it might even be the invasion of another glacier, intruding, overtaking. Crevasses hint, tell truths on the glacier that below there is turmoil—things are not all that well, there's been an instant reordering of the topography, a sudden pivot indicating a sense of wrongness, perhaps a



death in the family or the leaving of a lover. Luckily, crevasses never cut through the glacier to the core. Crevasses are only on the façade, jagged wrinkles of the outermost surface, harsh reminders of glacial vulnerability. Whatever caused the hurt, while perhaps not fully known to us, still, it left the ice raw, exposed. The scars don't last, though; unlike in people. I've seen glaciers pick up sudden speed, intoxicated on a new direction, a smell, a hope—the excitement of speed slamming the ice into itself, stitching, closing the crevasse, healed. Hollywood shows crevasses yawning open at whim; rarely however, during actual crevasse conception, does this happen. To create the crevasses, the wrinkles, long days of constant opposite pressure and force are needed, a slow snapping inevitable. The cuts on the surface of a glacier take a lot longer to create than heal.

The place where I fell into a glacial pool was in a large crevasse field about a mile up from the terminus of the Denver Glacier in northern Southeast Alaska. There, huge ice walls had thrust up out of the level surface of the glacier. Several friends and I were on-glacier ice climbing and camping. At the time, I was working intimately with glacial ice as a guide and naturalist. I was exhilarated by glaciers, drawn to them as a drowning man to land.

Glaciers are sturdy, trustable. How the ice looks is how the ice is going to be. All glacial ice has the same parameters, but within those parameters variation is in the millions. Glacial ice creation is a trusty, elegant, step by step process that involves immense amounts of pressure and time. I'm drawn by the purposefulness of it all, the steady, intentional creation of this frigid place.

The vastness of glaciers is created by an amalgamation of the miniscule. Imagine your hand, with fingers spread out wide. The hand is one whole snowflake. The palm is the center of the flake, and the fingers are the snowflake's fine phalanges, the furry, crystalline antennae. When it snows, the flakes fall from the sky and land atop one another, like one hand resting on another hand. In most climates, eventually, the piled up snow will melt away with spring. But in places where more snow falls than melts away, glaciers form. They form because as the flakes pile up, multiple hands on top of each other, pressure and weight builds from the bottom of the pile upwards. The snowflakes' antennae reach out for each other, grasping, holding, molding into one another to create a uniform of glacial anonymity. Air is squeezed out of the open spaces between, and then the snowflakes themselves begin to shed their antennae, their fingers, dissolving down into

the gaps. Soon, all that is left is the snowflake's center, the palm. This slowly hardens and compacts even more, transitioning into a tiny round granule called firn. Add more pressure, more more more, and soon the firn weld together into glacial ice. This process, this slow, deliberate creation of glacial ice—it can take from 50 to 50,000 years to form.

I believe in glacial ice. To me, it's a process I can count on, a reliable planetary progression, a combination of elements and time and thought that is much more substantial than anything else on Earth. I am attuned to the idea of frozen rivers carving immense landscapes, mere direction differentiating between mountains and valleys. I believe in glacial permanence, even as it melts under my feet and whispers away. This is ice that shapes backdrops and geography and terrain and self identities. One Earth moment the view is such, blink for two seconds and suddenly everything has changed. Glaciers are like deaths; one morning everything is different, the scene is unrecognizable—there used to be a mountain there, a mother, and now there is empty space, just a valley.

My submersion within the glacier was an accident, but it was foreseeable. Simply, it went as this: I had my crampons sunk into the ice, David on my belay. We were situated at the base of a wall and between us and the ice wall was a pool of blue black glacial water. No one knew how deep the pool was, but then, none of us had gone down into it.

We were top roping—teammates had set an anchor near the top of the ice wall and the rope triangled from David to me through the carabineer up top. David was about two thirds of the way up the wall when he hit rotten ice. Rotten ice has a lot of oxygen inside the tiny individual crystals—it's "airy." It's neither structurally sturdy nor strong; and cannot hold an ice axe that has a human body weighted on it.

David sank his ice axe into the rotten ice, flinched at the ice splatter, and leaned back. His axe cleaved out of the wall and he plummeted.

I saw him fall in slow motion, and instantly realized what was going to happen to me. There was no one at fault here. Accidents happen. Had I been tied in to a separate anchor, I would not have been pulled into the pool. Crampons will protect you from most directional pressure—except from up. And David was above me. As he fell, I was yanked off my feet and into the sky. He managed to catch his axe into the ice and break his fall, but I'd already attained lift off.

I twisted in the air and then descended in a slow arc into the pool. I sank. Cold crept in, flash freezing.



I flailed my legs, my arms, churning to keep my head above water. My lungs ached as the icy water wrapped itself tightly around my core, squeezing, isolating.

There, at times, appears to be a world outside, off the ice, and a separate, insular world on-ice. To differentiate the two is to believe that sometimes other-worldly events occur on the ice, that the rules of living and existing are different here—if they exist at all. On ice, where water melts and freezes in an hour, where polar bears build castles and the white queen waits, paradoxes and mysteries abound.

Things on-glacier work in opposites. The sunnier it is, I've learned, the colder it gets on the ice. Clouds act as a blanket, insulating—when they're gone the ice simply reflects all the sunshine and heat back out into space, leaving the surface frigid and deceptively cold. The warmer the sun is, the colder it is here.

Things move on the ice that, in the real world, don't normally. Huge boulders roll up-glacier, swimming along salmon-style against the ice stream. From a distance, I've seen rocks, stranded in the moraines, pick themselves up and walk across the ice plains. I attribute a quarter of this miragism to sublimation: a glacial phenomenon where the ice vaporizes instead of melting. Sublimation looks exactly like waves of heat pouring off of tarmac on a hot day. Looking down glacier, everything gets wavy and dizzy and the mirage-like effect distorts distances and causes the ice world to move, shake, dance. Bright high-July days cause positive identification of spirits and bears and apocalyptically approved futures looming mere feet outside your range of vision—just down-glacier. Turn your head to make eye contact with your future: it is gone, dancing off into the other world.

I believe glaciers like to appear mysterious, unreal, other-worldly. It lends them a certain level of instant respect, a careful handling of an unknown beast. The cracks, pings, shutters at odd moments: the ice below the feet is changing and shifting and there is magic involved in the liquescent movement. Out here, I've seen rivers appear and disappear, discovered bird bones 70 feet down in a crevasse, and watched ice spirits summon sudden summer snow storms.

Glaciers are not dead. Their demise has been foretold by men in warm white offices far from here. But they are very much alive, shaping, creating, birthing. They may be isolated, but they are still here, present in both our world and their's.

Once, hiking off ice, still a mile from the toe of the glacier, I found a tree, growing on the ice, out in the second lateral moraine. It wasn't supposed to be

there. Its roots touched bare ice, twisted and gnarled and grasping small rocks. But it grew, surreally, wrapped in around itself, isolated from the forest, tucked in, only four feet tall and fighting it out.

Cold does funny things to people. It's well-known. People get so cold they get hot. Bodies found frozen are often naked. Cold tends to come in and take the mind away, wandering far off, leaving the lonely body and the frightened sightless eyes. When I fell into that glacial pool, the cold came and took my mind, took it far far away.

I wasn't scared. I was glad to not be physically present in a place that was painful. I didn't have a way out of the pool and I had to place faith out into the world that help would come. I could feel my body slowly morphing, transitioning, becoming glacial. My mind fled to the ice world.

I went to an icy river running fast in the heat of a high summer day. There, I walked my mind-body to the edge of the water, where the hot sand rubbed with the frozen surface ice. The ice was as white as the soul of the sun, grainy and exact and insistent in its destruction.

I existed briefly in this other world defined by contradictions of hot and cold. Heat bore down from the sky and collided with the frigid ice. I watched the ice rub the sand, dislodge and assimilate each granule. I watched a transfer of existence. The hot sand became cold ice with little fanfare.

The ice world I was fully submerged in as I floated at death's doorstep in that glacial pool, this was a world where glaciers themselves weren't dying, a world that had never considered the terms global warming and climate change. This was a world where glacial death certificates hadn't been signed in permanent ink. Here, what was a given was not necessarily the foreseen outcome. Here, surprises and hope lingered.

My trust in other people is well-placed. I could not have gotten myself out of the pool on my own. I needed help and got it. I was pulled violently out of the water by a member of the climbing team. I'm not sure how he did what he did, how he fished the hood of my jacket into his hands, and then hauled me to the edge of the pool and back into this world, a rebirth, a return.

There is no state more helpless than knowing what you are supposed to do, knowing all the steps to make the problem better, but being entirely unable, powerless, to help yourself. To stand idly by and hope help comes, or completely give in to what you think



the future will be: to lose agency in the face of death or hurt—never before has there been such darkness. And even if help comes, it is still so hard to hand off your fate to strangers, to kindle hope in otherness. It is better, perhaps, to trust in your present state of isolation.

During our world's last major Ice Age, isolation was a conceivable form of survival. In Southeast Alaska today, if you look up and gaze at the sharp peaks—you're looking at the few remaining ice-free chunks of land during a time when a third of the world was covered in ice. In Southeast Alaska, the ice sheeted everything, gouging out fjords and razoring mountain sides and sloping valleys: everything but what the First Nations People, the Tlingits, named Nunataks: islands in the ice. Nunataks are land ports, jagged wrinkled peaks of ice-free isolation that stood alone, year after year, for the two million years of the Pleistocene. Hidden up there in bare rock were seeds and plants and mosses and insects and animals, waiting, waiting, and when the ice blew its final breath of frigid power over the world and slowly crept back, they returned and isolation was validated. But isolation in all its glory is only as strong as the return it hopes for.

Just as one glance at a glacial surface can determine its topography, so too can one look at human skin and determine the level of cold injury. Simple cold injury shows the skin turning white. Blood has retreated, but not given up. It will return with the correct incentive—gloves, heat, hot breath on cupped hands. A little care, a little consideration. But deeper cold injury shows itself with darker shades—blood has packed up everything and blackly left—with little hope of return.

My cold injury was simple—I was cold and miserable and numb. Laying in the tent after being submerged in a glacial pool, I was in hot agony. White, the pain came in waves, flashing up my body. I felt like my feet didn't have skin and the pain was steel wool rubbing over my exposed flesh, grating.

Hours passed. My friends took turns, watching, helping me. They wrapped me up firm, tucked into three sleeping bags nestled into one another, me, at the core of down. It was hot. I couldn't feel my feet and kept waving my lower legs mermaid-style, the entire pile of legs and blankets jerking up and down spastically. I felt like a fish. My mind wasn't working properly, and I remember trying to mentally check through my body to assure myself all my limbs were still there. I was afraid, because I couldn't feel my legs; I assumed they weren't there anymore. I remember

thinking that because I felt like a fish encased in down sleeping bags I must have fish-like properties. If things didn't go well I could possibly swim out of the tent, that I could transfigure my new legless body to survive underwater, that I could exist without limbs. I reassured myself that perhaps I could forge out a new life in the waterways of this world.

That night I tried to sleep, and instead had waking dreams as the glacier under me cracked and groaned. I could hear pinging, hissing, as air was released from the ice. I browsed my mind, bundled up as a fish, scared. I dreamt of wild futures.

Halfway through the night the glacial world, the one without the normal world's rules, started to creep in, intrude; the other world receded and shifted away and the ice world became real. I dreamt then of my dad's farm, of his water trough and his fish named Albert. In my glacial state, Albert and I morphed, became one.

Albert is my dad's fish. My dad bought him as a small fry, a scoop of Koi fish in a plastic sack full of water. Albert arrived originally at my dad's farm with ten other family members. Unfortunately, as winter set in, the water trough down in the corral my dad placed his fish family in froze over, the ice getting thicker and thicker until it appeared to us that the tank was frozen solid. We never bothered to break up the ice that winter. But come spring thaw my dad discovered Albert at the bottom of the trough, his bright orange two-inch long body darting through the flowing water.

I don't know how Albert survived the winter: his demise was assured, his doom foretold, especially as early on into that winter dad started seeing dead fish bodies in the icy slush. I wonder what Albert must have thought, each day waking up to his tank getting smaller and smaller, darker and darker, the ceiling creeping down. I wonder if Albert felt fear. I wonder if he thought he would be suffocated by the frozen isolation.

Out on the Denver Glacier, frozen, heavily wrapped in down blankets and surrounded by hot beverages and warm bodies—I knew what Albert must have felt. I understand Albert was not scared that winter in his trough. I think, instead, he showed all the signs of having been patient, hopeful. Albert believed in his own right and strength for life in this world. He experienced the worst possible thing for a fish, and he survived.

I think Albert must have found himself a small pocket of water and air in the bottom of the trough, and all winter long he must have glided through







lonely tight laps, humming to himself, counting the days. Sometimes, to survive, one has to retreat and force isolation upon oneself, perhaps in hopes that a return is eminent. I believe that if Albert's feelings are anything like mine, he must have felt a flash of fish despair as one by one, his brothers and sisters and mother and father froze solid. He must have watched, speechless, as their bodies became part of the fate that isolated him—inching in closer and closer.

But as bad as this must have been for him, Albert had some form of fish hope. As he circled the cold graveyard of his family, he believed in this world's ability to sustain life. He believed in this world's grace. Albert knew eventually a thaw would come and free him of his isolation. He did not give in, he simply hummed and kept moving his fins and waited.

Unlike people, glaciers have clearly visible lines of equilibrium. You can look right up on the mountainside and see exactly where the ice keeps itself in balance, where the stability and symmetry of the glacier is maintained. Anything above that line of equilibrium is the accumulation zone for the glacier. Everywhere below that line is the ablation zone. All the new snow and ice is received, logged, processed in the accumulation zone. But like people, the less a glacier is able to take in, whether it is snow or water or hope or faith, the smaller it gets. If nothing new comes in, the glacier isolates itself and starves.

One glance can tell you what a glacier's doing. The higher the equilibrium line is, the quicker the glacier will vanish. If the line gets pushed all the way to the mountain top, the glacier is not long for our world. A healthy glacier shows a good balance, an even keel between input and output. There has to be something going in, feeding the ice, enflaming the glacial soul—energy and stimulation and direction and help—if that weakens or goes away the entire being becomes unhealthy and rots from the inside out. After a certain point it just can't recover.

I think humans place value on isolation, and in the subsequent return. When we see something in isolation, there is an implied tangibility of hope. If just a little bit can hold on, even if it is alone, all by itself, hope and help and return are coming. Just wait. Isolation implies, somehow, a coming back to life. A rebirth. Something new. When we walk through the place of darkness alone and emerge, whole, alive again; this is cause for celebration among those who knew us

before. There is redemption here. They say.

When I was pulled from the glacial pool I was cared for, tended, saved by my friends. I didn't lose my toes, my legs. The only real trace left over from that experience is that it seems now to take a lot longer to warm up whenever I get cold. But my friends—they talk about how close a call that was, how it could have gone so poorly. They talk of my return, my redemption.

My redemption. I'm not sure. There have been times in my life where I have deeply desired isolation, wished to never return to this world and face the darkness here. There have been times when I could barely summon the strength to hope that friends, somewhere in the world, would come help pull me out. Listening to expert men speak of the eminent disappearance of ice, scientists predicting 20, 30 years left in a glacial life, doctors admitting there is nothing more they can do—at some point it is easy and expected to believe the predicted future, to go along. My helplessness has been assured; they've said there is nothing I can do. Flailing does not help. But then I think of Albert, the fish circling his trough through lonely dark winters.

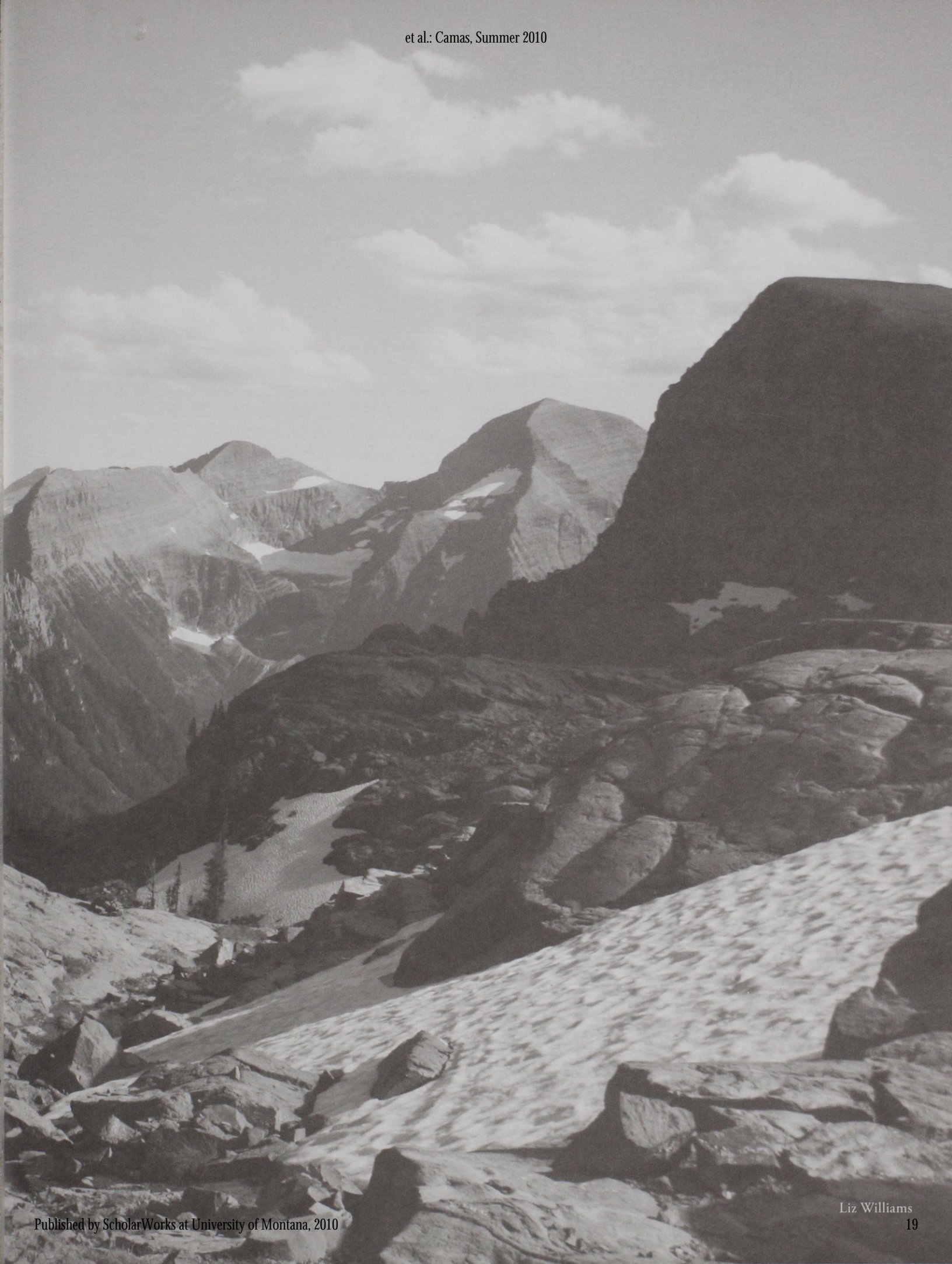
At times, I am like him. I am in a dark place, and it is only getting colder. But then, there is a difference between us, and this difference can be the redemption. At some point, what differentiates us is that I can leave the trough, the isolation. I can return here. I can sit on my deck in Alaska and gaze across the canal and watch the Harding Glacier slowly creep back, slip up the steep mountain side and curl into itself, alone. That glacier, I know, hasn't given in, hasn't thrown down a white flag of acquiescence. Its doom has been predicted, but there remains a fighting chance, a return through isolation. That glacier is sitting in a dark pool, waiting.

What I know is that for as close as we can come to the brink, the edge, when all the paperwork is signed and things are declared and the future is planned out: even then, I believe the future is still undetermined. In my eyes, there is hope for return. But sometimes we can't return until we begin the process of comprehending and contextualizing the new geography we find ourselves in, the raw new landscape carved overnight by unforeseen glaciers. Sudden crevasses in our lives can make us helpless and alone: but we are never isolated for long. What makes up a glacier, I remember, is millions and millions of little snowflakes, reaching out to one another, grasping hands. •











# The Limits of Landscape

Printed in Orion, Dec 2007

Rebecca Solnit

I love a lot of things that I think are at least a little problematic, from my car to cowboy movies, and landscape might be one of them. That is, landscape as a particular and peculiar mode of perception that prizes aesthetics and the visual, renders places and even nature itself quite literally flat and static, and often fails to see much else that might be out there. Landscape paintings and photographs perpetuate this habitual way of imagining what's out there, acting as blinders of a sort. There's nothing wrong with them, except when their version of the world becomes the limits of our imaginations.

I was in Ireland a couple of summers ago, talking about landscape with a bunch of art historians, and living in it for a few days: a stark, rocky western landscape of stone, low green plants, and grasses, with whitethorn and blackthorn and a bog here and there. But I could also describe it as an Atlantic coast expanse of constant wind, frequent rain, strange limestone formations, rare flora, and traces of colonial brutality—I catch my landscape bias telling me what to focus on. The majority of my colleagues in that remote, old place mostly talked about paintings of landscapes, and they often suggested that in talking about these images they were talking about the whole panoply of possibilities of art about nature.

There are a lot of other ways to imagine the natural world out there. Some of them were not very far away: the stone circles that the prehistoric Irish erected for ceremonial and celestial-observation purposes, for instance. A picture may capture a moment of time—late afternoon light raking over, say, the golden rocks of the deep desert—but a stone circle calls attention to time in a deeper sense, to the swing of sun from north to south across the sky over the course of a year, and to calendrical time. It is not just something to behold, but an invitation to observe and connect. It doesn't represent the landscape, but helps make the most invisible forces—time itself, and the rotation of the Earth—present, and brings you into alignment with these forces.

Landscape as a way of describing what's out there tends to reduce it to vegetation and form, and in so doing it misses or at least de-emphasizes the forces, processes, beings, and energies coursing through it on every scale from the microscopic to the galactic. Nature, as opposed to landscape, includes the migration of birds and other species, the changing

seasons, and much more—energies and phenomena that are neither static nor easily represented by static visual imagery. (This is why visual art so often relies on a title—"The First Swallow of Summer" or "The Salmon Swim Up Laguitas Creek, December"—to invoke what the image itself cannot depict.)

A culture that imagines the world out there primarily as landscape might impart a refined aesthetic of summer light or winter ice, but not a particularly sophisticated sense of organic time and space.

European and most American landscape art comes out of a tradition that represents land and the Earth as feminine and the feminine as passive—as something you act upon rather than an actor. It is easier to dump nuclear waste, for example, into a place you imagine as inert than one you understand to be constantly moving, changing, and connecting to everywhere else. That is to say, landscape is often a lot closer to real estate than are other modes of imagining the tangible, natural, spatial world around us. Indeed, much of the battle of the environmental movement has been to change people's imagination of the organic world from a collection of static fragments to a dynamic and deeply networked system, but the accompanying images—usually photographic and too often photographs of trite epiphanies—have not always served this agenda.

As early as the 1960s, sculptors and conceptual artists were already investigating what else they could do. Their bravura works in the years after functioned like surveyor's stakes, marking out a vastly expanded territory in time, in ideas, in roles, as well as in place. Landscape as such was mostly left behind, though landscape photographs often served as documentation of something that had happened out there: a walk, a performance, the drawing of a mile-long line across the desert. The bible of this transformation is still Lucy Lippard's 1983 book *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*, which connects the era's most radically innovative, performative, sculptural, site-specific art with prehistoric art's rituals, cycles, observatories, and abstractions. Lippard's point, put simply, was that the function of art, as well as its appearance, was being reinvented, or recovered, and the alternative models were very ancient.

What began as fairly formal artmaking in the world out there—for example Robert Smithson's 1970 Spiral Jetty on the north shore of the Great

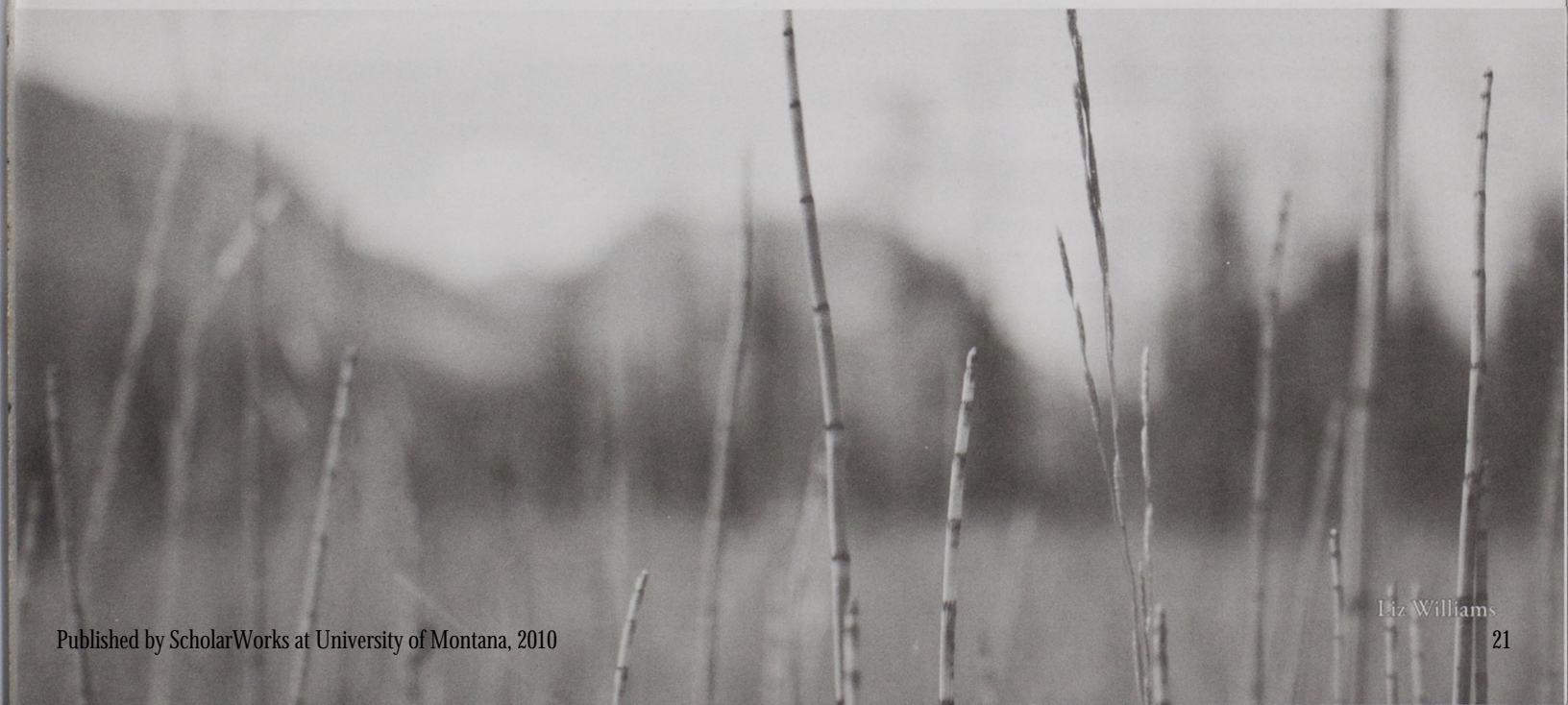


Salt Lake—was quickly surpassed, and as the range of artistic possibility opened up, so did the role of the artist. The German artist Joseph Beuys modeled himself after a shaman, performed hermetic rites with coyotes, but also swept streets, got involved with politics, and for one project in Kassel, Germany, in 1982, planted seven thousand oaks. Other artists experimented with environmental remediation, from Michael Heizer's 1980s mine reclamation projects to Mel Chin's famous 1990 Revival Field, a pioneering project to use hyperaccumulator plants to draw heavy metals from the soil. Mierle Laderman Ukeles became the artist-in-residence of the New York Department of Sanitation and devoted herself to making visible the city's waste and landfill, as well as the workers who clean up after the rest of us. Art became more a mode of investigation than a craft-based discipline.

Much of the art world since has pulled back to its concern with fashion and with representation, but engagements with land as something other than landscape still happen. The young artists now moving into this expanded arena are often involved in social-actions-as-art that are as fluid and as unframed as any performance or earthwork was then. In my own town, for example, Amy Franceschini has started investigating street sweepers and has completed a project to revive World War II-style victory gardens across San Francisco. These gardens function as a demonstration of existing possibilities and a blueprint for further transformation. Through involving others as gardeners, the power of the artist is expanded, or given away.

The art that meant most to me in the 1980s was mostly about presentation rather than representation. And it was about substances: there was Wolfgang Laib, whose displays of pollen were evidence of long solitary walks in blooming places; Ann Hamilton, whose materials included corn, mussel shells, hair, worn work shirts, and bread dough, referencing human labors as well as animal actualities; there were artists working with water, with earth, with blood, bone, honey, with organic systems. Some, including Hamilton, even brought live animals into the gallery. You saw not a finished work of art but one that was being made—or in Hamilton's case, unraveled. What they created was not a representation of a place out there but a sample of it, a piece of out there that suggested we pay attention to all the other things that connected here to there, from our garbage to our food. We have paid attention—particularly to food, sometimes as an upscale fetish but often as a moral and imaginative engagement with the world that lies beyond our urban and suburban lives.

Some of these works are deeply political interventions; one of the most eye-opening moments of my visual education was a 1992 debate between Andy Goldsworthy and the Cheyenne-Arapaho artist Edgar Heap of Birds, whose work pointedly incorporated—sometimes as actual public signs—all the political histories that aesthetic work like Goldsworthy's left out. And some of them still exist as objects in galleries, but they imagine and describe the world in very different terms than a landscape that just lies there. Individually, they can seem like small gestures, but as steps toward a redefinition of what the world is made of and a re-education of the imagination, they matter. •





# Why We Go A-Wolverining

Douglas H. Chadwick

*Excerpted from The Wolverine Way, Patagonia Books, 2010*

Winter always comes, and spring forever follows, but not all at once. You know how climbing a steep scree slope goes: For every three steps up the mountainside, you slide two back down. Sometimes three or four. Spring comes to the Continental Divide like this. It's a string of broken promises. First, the spell of soft weather. Then the blizzard that has you drawing back into your parka hood, frosted and fugitive amid deepening white drifts.

Yesterday, April Fool's, 2008, brought another snowstorm. Today, as Karen, Dave Murray, and I ski toward Bowman Lake, perched up in a basin in the park's northwestern corner, we have to sidestep newly bare ground. There are juncos picking fallen seeds from the soil and flocks of cedar waxwings in the cottonwoods, whose buds are beginning to swell and ooze pungent sap.

The sky is overcast, and more snow is falling. But it's token snow, a flake here, a flake there. Safe passage snow; Canada geese are flying northward through it. Disappearing-on-contact snow; within half a mile, we're taking off hats and gloves. I lift a ski to avoid running over a spider picking its way among the dissolving crystals. To travel closer and higher toward the continent's crown—ever deeper into the throne room of temperamental mountain gods—and encounter more welcoming weather is rare. The snow has stopped altogether by the time we reach the lake six miles farther up the valley. Massive, white mountain shapes rise from the shores, packed in vapors and often inseparable from them. When a summit appears through a wreath of clouds, it looms so high when seen from the lake that it looks as though the peak has come loose from its stone shoulders and started to float.

Six and a half miles long and not quite a half mile wide on average, Bowman Lake stretches like a fjord in the channel Ice Age glaciers scooped out between the mountains now named Rainbow and Numa. Moments after our skis intersect wolf tracks on the shore, we see some of the pack out on the lake's frozen surface, just as we did on two earlier trips this year.

During our first trip, the ice was wind-polished in between ripples of drifted snow. We moved over it scouting for places to chop through and set a tall post in the hole. First, we bolt a deer leg atop the wood and screw small, cylindrical gun-cleaning brushes into its sides. The post then becomes a passive device to snag wolverine fur for DNA analysis. Murray was preparing another of these bait posts by himself when four wolves came trotting his direction from the opposite shore. They were clearly coming to see what was going on. As Karen and I watched from a distance, the group—three grays and a black—drew closer, while at least a dozen more wolves began singing in the surrounding woods.

"Cool. After they kill him, let's take his stuff and tell everybody the wolves carried it off."

"Where'd Murray go? I can't even see him now."

He was hiding behind overhanging branches, not because he was nervous but because he was trying to get a photo and didn't want to scare his curious visitors. The four of them stopped about 75 yards off. They stared his direction for a few moments, turned and went half a mile toward the head of the lake, veered from the edge to the center, and lay down to relax there on the ice, rulers of all in view.

This afternoon, there are three gray wolves and a black on the ice again, though they're a mile distant. We ski out to inspect a deer carcass 200 yards from shore. The body lies in pieces, stripped to smooth bone. According to the footprints in the trampled snow, ravens and eagles did most of the clean-up. Fresh otter tracks from farther up the valley skirt the remains and continue to open water around the lake's outlet.

Pressing on, we check our two posts. Placing a series of such hair traps in various parts of the park is an attempt to add information about the wolverine population's makeup without directly intruding into the animals' lives. We're hoping that setting the posts out on lake ice or open shores will keep the bait from being eaten by other climbing predators such as martens and lynx, which generally stick close to forest cover. It also helps that the scavenging birds seem to avoid the raised deer legs for some reason.

Not surprisingly, wolf tracks circle the posts. But we find no wolverine tracks or fur. I guessed from a distance that we wouldn't, because I could see the bait just as we had left it. At stations in other drainages, wolverines had not only coated the gun brushes with hair but also grooved the wooden post with their claws and made off with the legs we'd attached by heavy bolts driven through shoulder bone. British Columbia biologist John Krebs documented a wolverine dragging the carcass of a mountain goat for nearly two miles. For animals with this kind of strength, ripping loose one of our bolted-down deer legs was probably like trying to open a bag of airplane snacks is for us—an absurd annoyance no one wants to hear you fuss about.

We'll check again in two days and then take those posts down for the season before a grizzly bear does it for us. I thought we might cross the tracks of a grizz or two on the trip in today since males are already emerging from their dens. Tomorrow, we'll ski to remove a post at the lake's far end. Bowman's surface is smooth, its snow cover less than an inch thick, granulated and good for gliding. The clouds are staying high through late afternoon. I'm looking forward to a fast 13-mile round trip with open weather and fresh wolf tracks to read along the way.

Before the light fades, we open up the small patrol cabin that serves as our quarters, chop wood to get a fire



going so we can melt snow for water, and settle into an evening routine of dinner and talk around the stove. As always, the snowmelt tastes of spruce and fir needles, lichens, bark, and smoke—the flavor of an evening in the woods. The first person to head out the door for a nighttime pee returns saying, “It’s snowing again, coming down pretty heavy.” When I go out with my headlamp for a look, the air incandesces with so many flakes that I can barely make out the trees close behind. Two hours later, it’s snowing harder. Our trip to the upper end of Bowman won’t be so quick after all.

I fall asleep almost instantly and set off wandering the busy dream world I often enter the first night after leaving home for a different location. Upon awakening, I see Karen silhouetted against a deep red glow. It takes a moment to register that she is feeding wood into a cabin stove to bring coals back to life. An early riser, she admits to being a little worried that she might have overdone it this time and apologizes in case the hour happens to be closer to midnight than to dawn.

“Anyone know what the time actually is?”

“Ungh. Nunh-uh.”

“Me neither.”

Of course not. None of us ever seems to be wearing a watch out here. It’s almost an unspoken pact. If we’re to be ruled by any schedule, let it be calibrated by the levels of strength in our limbs and degrees of light in the sky. Right now, the time is quarter after beginning-to-stir-in-the-dark.

Karen proceeds to make coffee and fetch more snow to melt and fill our water bottles for the trip ahead. “Still coming down,” she announces on her way back through the door. I tromp outside in camp slippers. They disappear into seven inches of new snow.

Ah well. In theory, each of us will only have to break trail a third of the way. That’s part of the point of working with a team of three; that, and having two people to haul on the end of a rope if the lead person breaks through the ice. This time of year, it is bound to be weakening badly at the lake’s head, where two open streams discharge mounting currents. Grabbing an armful of lodge-pole logs from the woodbox, I return to the warmth and candlelight and good companions inside.

Dawn arrives an hour or so later. The snowfall dwindles as the brightness grows. From the lower branches of a spruce, a varied thrush, the North Woods counterpart of the robin, whistle-trills a song that says, “Snow or no snow, spring has sprung.” Ground mist—usually a sign of clearing skies above—stretches across the lake ice, hovering, constricting to wisps in places, rolling like a fog-bank in others, always reconfigured the next time you look. Once again, it is the vast expanse of the lake ice that appears solidly moored while the mountains above seem adrift on the vapors.

Murray makes a few final preparations under the porch roof and leaves with a light backpack, saying he’ll break trail for a while and we can catch up. From the spark

in his eye, I doubt it. When Karen and I ski onto the ice, he’s already a small, black, distant figure in a universe constructed in shades of white. He enters a tongue of mist and dissolves within it, as if his presence had been an illusion all along.

“He’s got a lead of more than a mile.”

“My guess is we won’t see Murray again before the head of the lake.”

“No, he’s built for going, not stopping and waiting.”

Karen and I depart hauling one sled for the two of us. We fall into a rhythm of pausing every so often to switch the load. Not to brag, but we’re good at this kind of routine—reading one another’s energy level, wordlessly sharing tasks in the field. We ought to be; when we got married, I think Elvis was still doing shows in Vegas and newly formed Apple had just introduced something called the personal computer.

No animal has been out on the ice since the storm ceased. The fallen snow passes by completely unmarked, the miles absolutely silent. I’m thinking of how I’ve seen city dwellers react when wilderness quiet enfolds them. They look around themselves, uneasy, then awed, listening carefully. Many have never heard no-sound before. As the forest on the shore behind us blurs to a low, dark horizon, the wide plastic sled creates what looks like a luge path to infinity through the snow in its wake. Karen and I have a sense of being the only people in a freshly forged part of the continent—except for Murray. Blazing the track, he must be feeling like the first and last creature on Earth.

It’s been two hours since I saw the trailbreaker, but I can envision his path. I know he never sees his skis through the first half of the journey. He simply swings his feet through the downy cover of snow, and his body slides forward over it without so much as a whisper. It isn’t like walking on a cloud, but it may be as close as a person can ever get outside of a dream—or heaven, if the place is half as white and fluffy as it’s cracked up to be.

As the day warms, the snow imperceptibly settles until Murray at last notices not the upturned tips of his skis, not quite yet, but the twin lines they start to etch three feet in front of him as they tunnel just under the surface and cause crystals on top to cave in. I wonder if Murray entertains himself by pretending, as I sometimes do, that it isn’t his hidden skis cutting those lines but some mysterious force showing the path toward his destiny.

Bowman Lake bends toward the northeast from foot to head. To set the straightest course, you orient on a conspicuous point about three miles distant on one side. After passing that, you switch your aim to a point on the opposite side roughly two miles farther on. Each becomes your sole objective on the flat, unchanging field of no-color. Trouble is, so long as you’re watching, neither point ever seems to get closer. Whatever you do, don’t start counting: step, pole One; step, pole Two...Hauling several-hundred-pound loads on their sleds, polar explorers knock out this kind of white mileage before breakfast. How do they divert their minds from the march?



Eating sandwiches on the edge of point number one, we hear our first noise of the lake trek: a subdued raven mowl, issued over and over, sounding like a question rather than the usual raucous commentary these birds voice. We're in a shadow thrown across the basin by Rainbow Peak, but sunlight is blazing on the ice ahead. The topsy-turvy weather pattern continues with skies growing brilliant blue toward the heights and brewing storms over lower elevations behind us.

A half-mile beyond point number two, we hear the journey's second noise: thunder that lasts for more than a minute. It comes from an avalanche about 200 feet wide sweeping down a sunstruck, south-facing chute. More slides rumble as we follow Murray's approach to the lake's head. His track parallels the shore now. He chose to keep close enough to the edge here that he could shatter his way to land if he fell through the ice.

Karen and I find our teammate lying in the sunshine at the bared base of a Douglas fir on a mattress made of his coat and rain shell. Stripped down to a T-shirt, he's half asleep and totally at home. Just getting to Murray's Nest, as we name the spot, our ski tracks instantly fill with water behind us and turn to slush. We know that the ice has grown even more perilously thin between us and our post, which stands about 200 yards farther, wired to a large root of driftwood on shore at the very head of the lake. There are already narrow strips of open water along parts of that beach. A lone, lost-looking mallard swims in the widest one, a gap of about 15 feet around the mouth of one incoming stream.

We don't have to traverse this final stretch of ice if we don't want to. We could get to the post by circling on land around a small bay. But that would involve crossing the other incoming stream. Murray has scouted it and tells us we would probably end up wading at least waist deep.

My idea of a solution begins with leaning back against a tree to rest, eat, soak up sun, and watch light play across the geometries of the peaks. We've made good time and have more hours than we'll need to get back. Finally, I tie one end of the safety rope around my chest, pass the other to Karen and Murray, and start straight for the post over the ice. Halfway there, I'm probing and stabbing ahead with my ski pole every step, testing the thickness. Thirty feet from shore, it seems to be the night's snow as much as the soft ice underneath that's spreading my weight enough to still hold it. Water is beginning to seep into my tracks. I call for slack in the line, pick the only snow bridge left where the shore ice meets land, and race for it with all the speed I can muster. It's not cross-country skiing and not quite water skiing. Let's call this hybrid glooshing. It gets me to shore. The others gloosh routes close to mine, and we all arrive at the post with moderately dry boots.

The last time Murray and Karen were here, they uncovered the local phenomena known as larch balls—

clusters of larch needles tightly compressed by the action of waves washing them up and down the sloping shore through late autumn. They form ovals and spheres ranging in size from swan eggs to beach balls. After setting up the bait post, Murray and Karen spent an hour rolling larch balls across the ice toward targets, or, as they called it, Bowling for Wolverines.

Unfortunately, it didn't help bring any in, at least none that touched the bait or left hair on our post. Studying a carnivore that naturally exists at extremely low densities, you get used to what scientists euphemistically term negative data; that is, you learn a lot about where they haven't been lately and what they weren't doing, and you tell yourself that this is an improvement over not knowing a blessed thing. I log the no-data in my notebook. The post comes down and we turn for home, gliding easily now in the trail we made through the snowpack.

The luge track to infinity guides our skis straight, making it easier to look around at the slopes to either side and the big cumulus clouds billowing and squalling over the Whitefish Range far to the west. So much space, so many colossal shapes, and yet I'm keenly aware of immediate details and patterns, the slightest breeze or change in snow depth close at hand. My eye catches a dark fleck amid the crystals: an early mayfly—way early. Then a winged ant with soaked and crumpled flight gear. Did these individuals have a slightly different chemistry that fired them up to emerge long before their insect peers? Were their biological clocks haywire? Could it be that they simply misread cues from the environment? Warm day; downright hot here in my miniscule niche on shore. Must be time to take to the air, go prospecting for mates. Bet it's Action Central out there...somewhere...a little farther... Whoa! What was my bug brain thinking?

How my consciousness can be so absorbed by the enormity of these surroundings and laser focused on minutiae at the same time is a mystery. I only know I'm in a state of awareness more all-inclusive than I recall experiencing before, and I like it. Instead of casting about for mental escapes, I want to take in everything about the march now, too—the motion of boots and bindings, the friction chafing my toes and heels, the pull of the sled against the rope coiled like a harness across my shoulder, the complaints of muscles and tendons forced into repetitive motion mile upon mile—take them in and accept them. Accept that tiredness is what happens when you're on the move, and that it happens after fewer miles as you get old, and that I qualify as old. So what? In your finest hour afoot, you were never a wolverine anyway, Chadwick. But then you already know that. Just keep going and keep doing it, old fella. Don't waste a perfect tabula rasa like the frozen surface of Bowman by complicating life with couldadone-this and wish-I-were-that. Just be what you are. Just be. •



# on our backs: many glacier

Rick White

when i broke up with her  
on our backs  
in a tent  
near the bears,  
miles away  
from a car, a train  
or any other  
means of escape,  
after she asked me  
why  
i was being distant.











# Stan Meets Hank

Harrison Rutledge

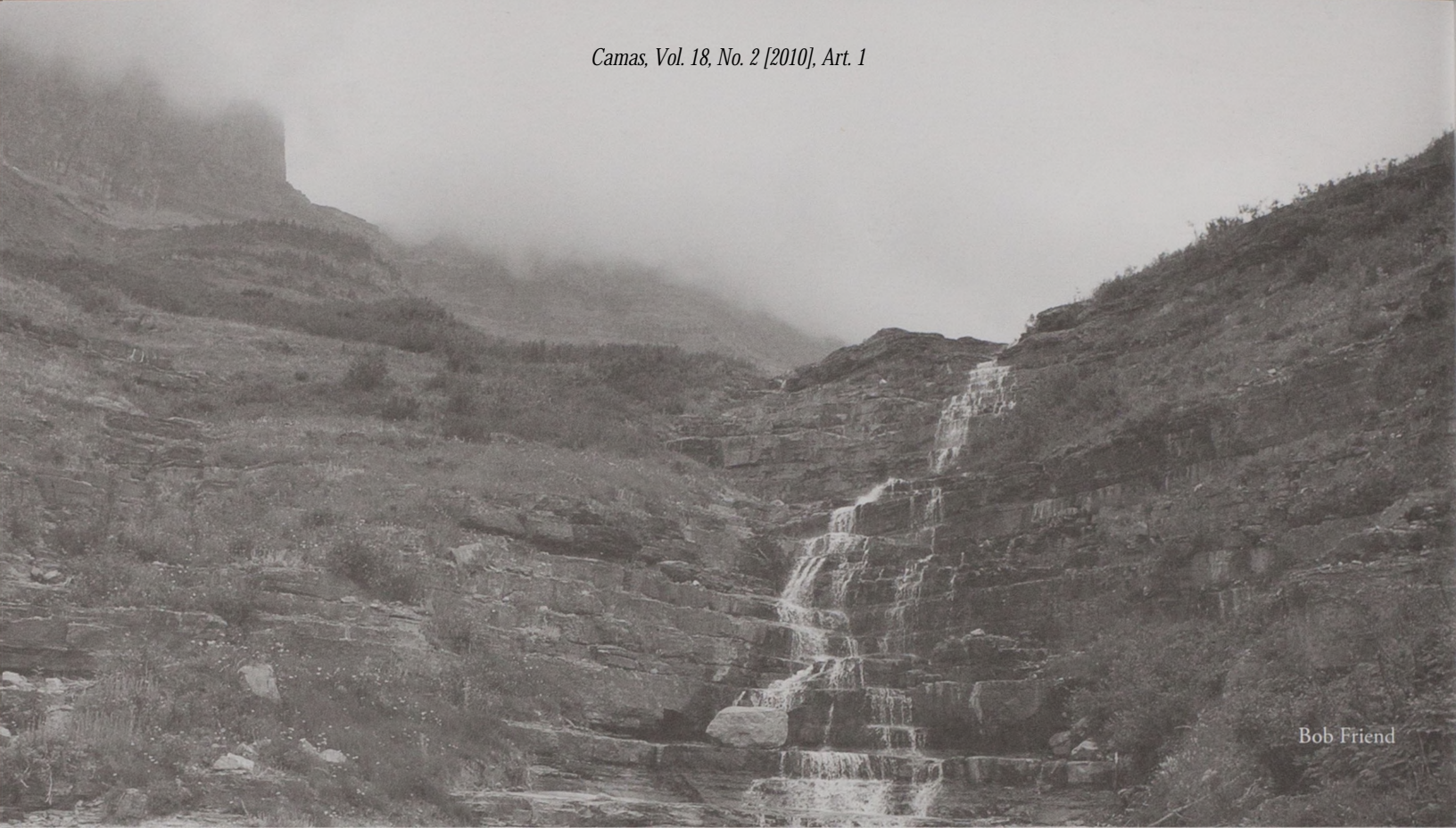
Hank in papers, third laureate  
In the Big Sky State elected.  
His words from loudspeakers  
At his ranch beside drum as  
The collective past that meets  
All skins. His Real Bird Ranch  
Hosts the 1876 Custer Yellow  
Hair slaughter. A poet's Six  
Gallery voice traps force  
Against the Big Three's jugs  
Yet someone does mimic the other.  
Stan, my grandfather, would recognize  
Him since he converses with fifty or so  
Comrades every time I visit the Raven's  
Rez. Over the years, these story-  
Tellers of plaid, cowboying, dust  
Curses, roughness, and perked ears  
Reach stardom, wearing memories  
Of breechcloths, hoop games  
Joe Medicine Crow's histories  
War bonnets, uncommon elk  
Specimens, buffalo jumps  
Livestock, INFR rodeos  
Prairie dog townships  
And quick rise mornings.











Bob Friend

## Love is a Bear

Brian Schott

William had written countless articles about incidents in bear country for the local newspaper. Maulings. Lost hikers. Park management practices. The best way to avoid a bear while hiking in grizzly country is to let them know you are there. Bears, like love, need words to know where you stand. Silence can be deadly. Surprising a grizzly around some bend in a trail is a sure bet for trouble. Throw a cub and a sow into the mix, and you can almost count on a brutal mauling. The instinct to protect the young is fierce, deadly. Papa bears are different. While a mother will spend up to four years with her cub, the males like to roam, solitary creatures. They spend a few days with their short-lived spouse, mate, and go on their way.

William picked up the phone to tell his wife he would be late. Kelly had been waiting most of the afternoon for her husband to return from work, early as promised on Friday, to begin their weekend of hiking and camping in Glacier National Park. After finishing a story about a new ordinance that allowed people to keep up to six chickens within city limits, William had arrived home three hours late, quickly changed his clothes, and then jumped back into the

car for the 45 minute drive from their small home in Whitefish, Montana.

When the young couple parked their car in front of the backcountry permit office in Apgar, things were upset. The stench of their bickering followed them from the car and through the doors of the old one-room building. Anyone could smell it.

Kelly didn't wear her anger well. It spilled out like a bursting water hose and she made biting comments to her husband in front of the park ranger who prepared the paperwork for their weekend outing to Morning Eagle. The small backcountry campground had just reopened that morning, two weeks after the last sighting of Stella, a young 300-pound female grizzly bear who had taken a liking to nacho flavored Doritos. Throughout August, park rangers of the million-acre park had been implementing a negative reinforcement program aimed at behavior modification on the bear. Rangers used noise, barking dogs, and other non-lethal stimuli like rubber bullets to encourage young Stella to stop nosing around the campground for junk food and frightening tourists.



While they re-watched a video that explained how to travel safely and keep food away from their tents, Kelly whispered that Will did not understand what it was like to be a mother all day, scolding him while she bounced Lucy in her arms. William wore his bitterness in an uncomfortable manner, like clothes that fit too tight. He apologized to her once again, scratched his dark moustache, but didn't really mean it.

"You don't understand the pressure I'm under at work," he said. He'd been writing for *The Daily Inter Lake* for ten years. The editor job was opening. And there was nothing he was going to do to mess up his chances to advance.

"You have no idea what it's like to always be waiting for you," she replied.

Will received a compassionate rise of the eyebrows from the ranger while he asked a few questions about the re-opened campground, then followed his wife to the car. He would arrange for interviews with the bear team after the long weekend and return to the office with a fresh and vivid start on the story of successful behavior modification of the junk-food-loving bear. All the official Park stories had to go through the necessary filtering of a government communications office anyway. It was time to concentrate on his family. Be grounded. Life since the baby had been like a tornado. How had they gotten so lost so quickly? How could all the little things add up to so much? The "D" word had even been thrown around, a stupid threat from Kelly at first, escalating in arguments about money and time, his drinking, her anger.

They drove in silence, parked at the trailhead 10 miles up the Going-to-the-Sun Road, re-laced their hiking boots, and set off down the well-worn trail with Lucy riding in a seat on Will's backpack. Kelly pounced up the trail like a cat. Will lumbered along with the heavy pack like their old black lab. During the two-mile hike to the campground through the thick forest of cedar, larch, and cottonwood, the couple talked loudly along the trail, finally arriving at a small clearing near the shores of Morning Eagle, a large, deep lake ringed by jagged cliffs with mineral stains clinging to the granite from the waterfalls of springtime. A few errant raindrops splattered down into the dusty soil.

"Another late start from your father and here comes the rain," said Kelly, lifting the toddler from Will's backpack. Kelly was a natural athlete and her husband stared at her strong leg muscles as she crouched, tight hiking shorts hugging tan legs, steady hands placing the toddler gently on the ground. Lucy had never had a haircut and blond curls spilled over

small ears. He was startled by how similar the pair looked—his daughter a mere miniature of his wife.

Camping on the weekend after Labor Day had become a decade-long tradition for the couple prior to Lucy's birth. The tourists were gone and it was a time to celebrate the quiet of the forest—and in some ways, mourn the passing of summer. For the first time the previous autumn, they had skipped their annual outing, too tired with a newborn and the hike felt too impractical. Now they were here, trying to pretend that life could be something closer to what it was like before.

"Like I'm supposed to control the weather," he grumbled, throwing down his backpack.

On the lake in front of their campsite, a duck circled, hummed above the surface of the water, then splashed down, leaving a trail of scuffed-up water. It took off again and repeated these antics like some homage to the already dying day. A steady wind blew through the trees. Thunder tumbled down the wooded hillside as rain dropped in sheets across the far shore. Luckily, the storm appeared to be quickly moving away from them. The weather might just cooperate, Will thought, jotting a few quick lines in his crumpled reporter's notebook, noting details from his brief conversation with the ranger and other observations about the camping area.

"I might go ahead and—this spot is very nice," he said, pulling the tent from his heavy pack. "I love this time of year, there is something about—"

"Would you go ahead and put it—" Kelly motioned to a more level spot as she drank water from a wide-mouthed red bottle.

Lucy entertained herself by drawing in the sand with a small stick. She pointed to the lake and said: "Wah." Words were just beginning to bubble up within her. The peaks of the Lewis and Livingston mountain ranges in the distance were already capped with snow. Will looked at his wife and although Kelly's features were familiar and pleasing, he did not feel like he fully recognized her, a shattering feeling after more than a decade together. He traced the contours of her sharp cheekbones with his eyes. Kelly looked older than he thought she should and seemed tired, with small, fine wrinkles extending from the corners of her eyes. Her fingernails were long, but without nail polish. No doubt, her 30-year-old body had recovered well from the pregnancy, but there was something about those lines on her face that spoke of unbearable weariness.

Kelly looked at him. "Where's the cook stove?" she asked. "I'm pretty hungry."

Will's eyes opened wide. "It was on—I thought you—"



And then it began. Again. Had they known how close the bear was to the campground, picking up pieces of their words, they would not have been worried about a forgotten stove. Stella, hearing the angry words, lumbered further away, as snatches of the conversation followed her.

"I just can't believe how thoughtless—"

"It's not—there's something—"

"It's hard not to feel negative, Bill."

"If there was a way, that was better, now don't you think that—"

"I wait and I wait and then you forget—"

"What about me, and my job, and all the things that—"

"You never pay attention, so wrapped up in—"

"And you—what about all the times that—"

"We don't see you for days at a time when you're off—"

"Maybe it would be better if I just—"

"Maybe it would—"

And so it continued. Mama growled. Papa thundered.

Lucy looked up as the level of the argument rose in pitch, but continued playing, drawing lines in the sand with her water-worn stick. Every time Will threatened to leave the family, a wave of both peace and terror engulfed him. He had signed up for the long haul. But could he hold on?

Kelly suddenly declared that she was going for a hike. She sat on a rock and re-laced her hiking boots.

"What will we—?" then thinking better of it after a deep breath: "Make noise," Will told her. "Make lots of noise. And don't stay out too long. It'll be dark by seven." His tone was more father than husband.

Kelly kissed Lucy and looked at Will, then shook her head and began to walk. She did not notice the scratch marks on the trunk of the giant cottonwood as she hurried past it on her way into the heart of the forest. Kelly cried out "Hey bear!" as she walked and touched the canister of cayenne pepper spray on her belt.

An experienced camper, William busied himself with efficiently setting up the campsite. Lucy played with the tent poles and he created the dome. He unfolded camping chairs and they sat and ate granola bars as he pointed to woodpecker holes in the trees. Green lichen dripped from tamarack branches, their needles already beginning to turn a faded green before their October explosion of gold. Will unrolled the sleeping bags and spread them out inside the tent, excited to be sleeping again under the stars. He loved his job, but it preoccupied him unnecessarily. Out

here, he felt like he could breathe. Back home, with a growing mountain of debt and a wife who seemed bitterly angry with him every time he got home, he sometimes felt as if he were drowning.

"Come here," said the father, motioning calmly to his child with outstretched arms, his shoulders slightly sore from the weight of the heavy pack. She drew more shapes in the sand with a stick. "Let's get a fire going before mummy gets back." A soot-stained fire-ring of rocks was already built.

His eyes dropped to the ground and he gazed past the child to the trail leading into the darkening forest, about 50 feet away. It was four o'clock. Light would hang in the sky for another three hours. The wind gusted and the limbs of the giant cottonwood at the trailhead groaned. He crumpled some sheets of newspaper from the office and formed a tipi of wood around the pile of paper. He struck a match and noticed his byline melt into smoke. His fingers were streaked with newsprint.

"So whaddya think, Luce?"

The child smiled at him and walked on unsteady legs toward the fire. He looked at his watch, an antique timepiece that his wife had purchased for him on his last birthday. He lifted his head to the clearing sky, then back down and blew on the base of the flames.

"Oh, Lucy," he said, fanning the fire.

The wood began to crackle, then caught, and he added larger pieces on top of the hot embers. William looked into the struggling fire, then stared into the face of his daughter. The flames licked the dry wood.

"Hot," said Lucy with a big smile as she shook both hands, palms facing out and fingers splayed at shoulder level, making a baby-sign-language motion that Kelly had taught her. "Hot" was her favorite word, one that she took great joy and care in saying. She turned and began to wobble toward the lake. He hurried to her, picked her up, spun her around, and plunked her back down near the fire. He found a straight stick, whittled it to a point, pulled out a packet of marshmallows, and stabbed one through the center. Lucy giggled. He took out another marshmallow and broke off a piece for Lucy. He popped the other half in his mouth, took her hand, and helped her hold the stick over the flames.

They ate bananas, applesauce, and nuts while they watched the fire burn. He would save the loaf of bread and some cheese for Kelly's return. While his daughter nibbled on small pieces of cashews, he packaged up the food in a canvas sack, and then took Lucy inside the green, dome tent to change her diaper. He stripped off her shirt and wrestled her into flannel



PJ's, playing peek-a-boo with her pajama top. Then he carried Lucy down a small trail to the food prep area where he hung the bag of food and their trash from a tree. He returned to the fire and the dying light made him nervous as he looked at his watch. Just past five o'clock. He stared at his daughter and again felt as if he were looking into the face of his wife nearly 30 years ago, long before he had ever known Kelly. Lucy's features were so similar, the way a button nose fit between green eyes and how a supple chin spread into ruddy cheeks.

William sat quietly, breathing slowly, the side of Lucy's head resting gently on his shoulder blade, tired eyes on the glowing embers. Her head resting there and her warm body pressed tight made him feel whole. He gravitated to Glacier because it made him feel small, a little part of the big flow. But with his daughter in his arms, he felt big, like the starry arms of a galaxy. Lucy squirmed, and he twirled her around on his lap to face him, then readjusted her pajama-top buttons and smiled at her. He could see the flicker of flames from the fire make a kaleidoscope in her eyes, and he felt a wave of sadness. Where was Kelly? It was after six.

It suddenly occurred to him that his wife might actually have left *him*. Had she finally had enough? Or was she hurt? Even dead? The thought of Kelly dying in the woods made him feel as if his breath might stop—and maybe he wouldn't remember how to start breathing again. Why had they even bothered to come here? The notion of camping in bear country with his young family now seemed foolish, downright dumb.

Soon, Lucy's head sunk down and pressed a soft cheek into his chest. William hummed a little lullaby tune, softly patting her back. From time to time, the fire popped and the sounds of her breath lulled him into a place of muted emotion. He checked his watch. He shifted his head back to look at his daughter's face. Eyes closed, her skin looked as delicate as ice. The sun dipped behind the big cliff walls, creating an early sunset, a dusk that would linger. The light began to play tricks on his eyes.

Just before seven, he stood up and Lucy stirred slightly, separated her lips, but no sound emerged as he carried her inside the tent and laid her on their sleeping bags. He grabbed a blanket that his wife had knitted and covered her body. A crack of a branch outside the tent made him glance through the flap, but he could only hear the snap of the fire. He stared at his daughter and thought about the features of his wife's face again. Why did she feel like a stranger after all these years? He kissed Lucy on the forehead, and

emerged from the tent.

As he rubbed his hands together slowly above the fire in the growing darkness, he tried to reassure himself, sure that she just got preoccupied with finding more berries. He had done it himself. Sometimes when you pick huckleberries and your hands are all blue, you just get into a mindset where the berries are the only things that exist. Filling the bucket with these plump orbs of fruit, for some reason, means something. Time and real world worries disappear. He looked out again into the darkness beyond the fire's glow. The tree branches appeared to be moving, but the air was still, the apparition simply a trick of light from the flames. He paced around the fire, erasing the lines that Lucy had drawn in the dirt with a swipe of his boot.

Will walked to the tent, unzipped the flap, gazed at Lucy, then re-zipped the flap and returned to the fire, absentmindedly throwing one of Lucy's sticks into the flames. When he wasn't holding a stick, or adding a branch, he put his hands into his pockets and shifted his weight from one foot to the other, looking down at the ground. He scratched his scalp and cleared his throat.

When there was no more light in the sky, his hands smelled of smoke, and his stomach burned, he heard a sound, like a crackle from the fire, but more dense, as if the sound had weight to it. He heard the crack again, coming from the trailhead, but up high. Something was in the branches of the cottonwood. He waited for his eyes to adjust and suddenly saw what he was immediately certain was the feline shape of a large mountain lion. The comic side of his brain could not believe that he was about to be attacked. He steadied his eyes on the shape as he knelt to the ground, picked up a large stick, ready for a fight. Play dead with bears was the rule. You can't outrun them. But you fight a cat.

The rustling increased and he followed the shadow of the animal about ten feet up in the branches, but something wasn't quite right about the movement or the size. He walked backwards from the fire and braced himself at the mouth of the tent, holding the stick in front of him like a sword. The night was moonless and stars were beginning to shimmer from beneath the ink.

Kelly jumped from the last branch about five feet from the ground and walked quickly towards him with a slanted half-smile that seemed to say hello, I got you. He lowered the stick and shook his head, wincing as if in pain. No sound came from his mouth. Adrenaline raced to his extremities and he had the sense that his hands might explode. With rosy cheeks and bits of tree



bark littering her hair, she looked at him with neither remorse, nor anger, nor fear. She waited for him to speak. He started to laugh, shaking his head back and forth.

"I saw your bear—way across the lake," she said, in measured cadence as he shook his head back and forth, dumb. "I watched her for hours. She was digging for grubs. I couldn't put down the binoculars, she was so beautiful."

William felt like she had punched him, but he continued to chuckle, a little crazy. He let the stick slip from his fingers.

"And you know what? She has a little cub."

He stopped laughing. There was no air in his lungs. He forced out some words.

"But you were so quiet. What were you—?"

"—I knew I was late," she said. "And the whole time I was walking back, I wondered how worried you were. When I finally got here, I saw you bring Lucy into the tent. And for some reason, I just decided to watch you."

He stared at her, again unable to speak.

"All of a sudden I guess I wanted you to be me, just waiting. Like I always do. I wanted to make you feel—"

She paused, moving closer to him.

Words began to boil inside him, then sputtered.

"I still feel that—there are still times that—I just want so much that—"

He tried to make sense of his emotions, searching for anger, but the emotion he expected was not there. He started to laugh again.

"You can't just condition me like—" he stammered, his hysterical laughter increasing, echoing back to them from off the far walls of the cirque. The couple looked at each other in the flickering light of the dying fire, smiling. As his nervous laughter subsided, his mind peeled away layers of time and she appeared, in that firelight, like the girl he had fallen in love with so many years ago.

The gunshots rang out in the late morning—a single, layered explosion that startled the family as Will assembled his fly rod. The air was windless and the sound followed the trails of his laughter from the night before, ricocheted around the walls of the cirque, circled and then faded while Will and Kelly looked at each other.

"What was that?" Kelly said, as she walked over to Lucy and picked her up.

"I'm not so sure," said Will as he balanced his rod on a stump.

"Sounded like a gun."

"A rock slide?"

"No way. Too sharp."

"Should I go look?"

"Don't you dare leave us."

The answer arrived ten minutes later in the form of a park ranger with a rifle slung over his shoulder. He emerged from the thick woods, passed underneath the large cottonwood and approached the camping area in a hurry. He was dressed in full uniform, and looked a lot more like military personnel than a friendly ranger, a startling presence in the otherwise tranquil forest.

"What's going on?" demanded Will.

"Good morning, sir. I'm so sorry. Everything's okay. We had an incident."

"What?"

"The bear."

"Stella?"

The ranger walked closer and smiled at Lucy who continued to play with her stick. He removed his gun from his shoulder and rested the butt-end on the ground.

"We were heading down from the pass for more observations when she surprised us on the trail. She charged us and we had to shoot her. There was no choice."

"What about the cub?" asked Kelly, demanding, angry.

"Cub's been darted. We'll transport it out."

"To where?"

"Zoo. Yearling would never survive out here alone."

Will walked over to his pack and pulled out his notebook, but the ranger refused to answer any questions about the killing of a protected species—Park policy in talking with reporters. Will was referred to the communications office. He knew the drill.

"If you folks are okay, I have to go," said the ranger. "I'm sorry for the disturbance." And as quickly as he had broken the quiet of their morning, he disappeared down the trail toward the road and left the family alone once again. Morning mist rose up above the lake, swirling in smoky currents as the sun broke over the edge of the cliff walls. A few minutes later, Kelly spoke.

"I wish you had seen her," said Kelly. "She was so beautiful."

Will smiled at his wife and looked over the steaming water, thinking about the beautiful bear and her cub. •





## Ground

Grace Brogan

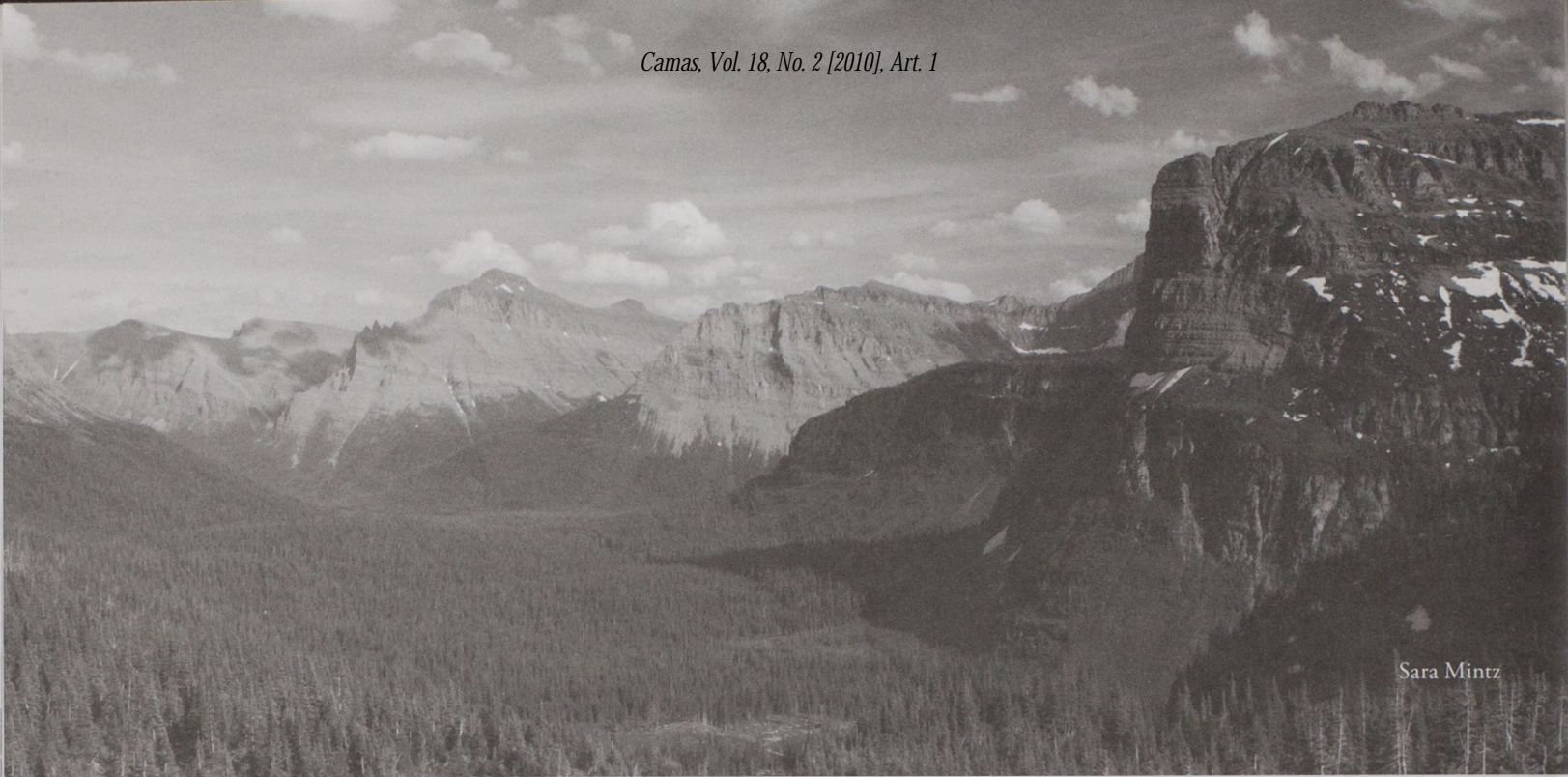
without choice we fall  
to pieces—age  
into fragments

scattered by raindrops, hooves, and wind

bone and mountain  
flesh and lichen  
(whatever remains, remains)

Tony Bynum





Sara Mintz

## Revival

Kathleen Yale

After the evacuation, we retreated to the east side of Glacier. The constant crackle of radio traffic kept us updated on the fire's progression, though the air alone was enough of a reminder—pregnant with dark smoke, hot and dry on my skin, in my throat. We kept up with business as usual, kept working on our research, trying not to wonder if our seasonal neighborhood on the west side of the park was going to burn up.

I could not help but ponder the irony of doing wetland surveys in the middle of the worst fire season in decades. But with the exception of brief imagined moments when I pictured the flames sucking entire ponds dry, like a drop of water sucked from a countertop with an open mouth, I considered the amphibians to be among the safest creatures in the park. In fact, having been through numerous fire seasons, my field-mates and I even anticipated the results that so many flames might have on the wetlands, on the toads. Abandoning the place you love most and knowing you may not even recognize it when you return is a sobering thought. And I took small, but necessary comfort in imagining what it would be like to survey that water the next spring, what we might find on the dark charred banks, what we might find beneath the logs of those black-bottomed ponds.

During my seasons on the USGS's long-term amphibian monitoring project, I loved walking shorelines looking for what creatures live on the edge of two worlds, counting the spotted frogs and boreal toads that leapt up and then dove deep between the reeds. This was a survey job. My principal task was to find things, find amphibians—to look down, to look small—to push aside rushes, lift new green leaves and sieve through mud. I was there to notice; to watch the oval-shaped water beetles ferrying between coasts like tiny rowboats; to feel dragonflies whiz past, retrieving those caught in the water so their veined wings could dry in the sun; to name the shapes of the shore rocks—smooth skippers, porous honeycombs, mini gray elephants.

Amphibians are important indicator species. Their moist, permeable skin makes them especially vulnerable to even subtle changes in their surroundings. Stressors such as change in water quality and availability, acid precipitation, environmental contamination, climate change, and increased UV radiation may all be factors in worldwide amphibian decline, and so their health is a good measure of an ecosystem's overall health. Often the harbingers of what is to come, we should all be concerned if their populations start to suffer. We were there to look around, to listen for warnings.



Glacier's wetlands come in all manner of shape and constitution. For the purposes of our data collection, each wetland was placed within a more specific category—lake, pond, marsh, fen. A site's origins and its lifespan were speculated—glacial, groundwater, manmade, flooding—permanent, semi-permanent, temporary. We measured temperature, conductivity, pH levels; looked at shoreline composition, aquatic vegetation, and shadiness. But chiefly we searched for amphibian life. Boreal toads, long-toed salamanders, Columbian spotted frogs, Pacific tree frogs, tailed and chorus frogs have all been documented somewhere within the park boundaries, and I spent these three seasons sweeping even the smallest of wetlands with a long-handled dip net, looking, looking.

Your search image changes as the months weather on. In spring it is the egg masses that demand your attention. Toads enter this world in long, thin gelatinous chains that string out in the water like a black-beaded necklace. Frogs are born in floating clumped egg masses, and female salamanders leave their eggs attached to reed stems and dead logs beneath the water's surface. By June many of the lower-elevation eggs have hatched, and the larvae remain close to shore, dark and tiny. I have never liked the term "larvae" as a descriptor for these new beings—something about it sounds too sterile, too removed. Standing above them, shin-deep in soft mud with a wet handful alive in energy, to me they felt like the very ambassadors of spring.

As they age, the tadpoles venture further from the shallows and begin to take on more distinct shapes. The toads remain jet black, a round body with a squirmy narrow tail. The spotted frogs grow bigger, their skin lighter, their noses more pointed. By the time their back legs emerge they are nearly the size of a misshapen ping-pong ball and can make audible splashing with their swift movements. And the salamanders stretch long and slender, as their gills fringe out like little Chinese dragons.

By mid- to late-summer we began to count the metamorphs that haunt the last puddles of nearly dried up ponds. My favorites were the toadlets, small enough to get stuck in a footprint; they are no bigger than a fingernail. Their characteristic single white back-stripe is as delicate as a graphite etch mark, and their legs look ridiculously tiny in comparison to their rotund bodies, the stick arms of a muddy snowman.

In the spring of 2002, a year after the Moose Fire raged through the park's western boundary, road maintenance crews were evening out run-off damage

on the Inside Camas Road when they noticed the space ahead seemed to be moving. Shutting off their engines, they walked ahead to investigate. In the road they saw thousands of boreal toads, small as coins, migrating from the area. Like popcorn, they said. A few phone calls and the road was closed until the toads made it across safely. We cheered when the little toads made it to the national news. Additional studies have since been launched to further explore toad's apparent preference for fire-disturbed areas, and my field partners and I spent extra time in old burns in the field seasons to come.

Now, several years later, the specifics of that great toad migration remain somewhat mysterious. Because our project was part of a long-term study, we already had a lot of pre-fire data. By comparing breeding-site data from before and after the burns, we could see an increase in toad-friendly wetlands. This is significant because boreal toad populations have been steadily declining over the last hundred years, and Glacier loses more traditional breeding sites each year. Combined with the continued loss of the park's namesake glaciers, these are alarming trends which deserve attention. Finding toads breeding in a pond where last year they did not is happy news indeed.

One thing that remains obvious is that Glacier's amphibians welcome some result of fire—just which aspect remains veiled at the moment, the answer hazy as if seen through a smoky room. Data collection continues as researchers work toward pinpointing what causes such breeding success and preference. Theories abound. Perhaps the creeping flames raised the soil temperature, or the dark ash added some key nutrient to the soil or water, some alchemist's ingredient.

Maybe after the forest canopy burned to the ground and floated away in cinders, the lack of shade and increased sunlight caused a boom in certain algae. I've seen such water explode into slime—the unfurling of a vast, green ribbon that gains size with each passing day, an expanding and delectable buffet for young tadpoles. And while I am curious to know the ultimate reason why toads and others are quick to colonize burned-up real estate, I am also content to wait a while. Let nature keep her secret a little longer.

Regardless of the cause, that day the road closed those toads were tangible reminders that while fire in nature may be a destroyer of the individual, for the whole it is more of a catalyst. Indeed, an essential catalyst. As I walked through the acres that had burned just the previous fall, I saw they were teeming with new life. Patches of morel mushrooms crowded in like small villages, bright yellow glacier lilies



shone against the black ash, and fresh green shoots surrounded nearly every charred snag or fallen log which glistened like fish scales.

For centuries folklore has connected salamanders, like the mythical phoenix, to fire. Even Pliny wrote about their supposed ice-cold skin and ability, proclivity even, to withstand biting flames. Perhaps this was because salamanders live shy lives and seek out secluded nooks under rocks and in dead logs, logs that might make good firewood. Or maybe it is because they resembled a form of dragon, in gentle miniature. In ancient Vietnam the people called toad “sky-god’s uncle” and thought he brought the rains in times of need. Throughout cultures both frogs and toads are commonly seen as a link to water and cleansing, but I find it interesting that modern ecology and ancient folklore might actually link them to fire as well. If toad brings rain for his own enjoyment, might he also withhold it to encourage a different form of cleansing through fire? Both animals are regarded as fertility symbols, and anyone on the Inside Road that day would not dispute their fruitfulness; prosperity, perhaps in part, brought through fire.

I’ve witnessed enough fires in Glacier to have experienced those first feelings of fear and loss at the sight of a sky thick with smoke, a brooding blood red sun, and papery bits of ash settling in the dry grass. I have sat across Lake McDonald and heard the roar of flames from the far shore, the hissing language of fire. Fire wields a tremendous power. But it was in the return trips to these burned areas that I began to make peace with fire, to understand it and the new life it encouraged.

Morels, for one, love to grow in recently burned areas. And I love to eat morels. Their humble shape and earthy-color makes searching for them more

demanding—it requires attention to detail, much like looking for amphibians. Eyes strain to distinguish one shade of brown from another, to differentiate rock from pinecone, pinecone from mushroom. And so when you finally lift your eyes from the ground, they pause in adjustment, and for a moment the forest is a blur. The sudden scale of it, too daunting.

This is how the antler came to me, gathering morels south of Glacier, dizzy from standing up too fast—a white shape glowing among the dull shades down slope, luring me like some glowing night-ghost in the dark. I slid down the slick slope and approached the apparition, blinking. It was a moose shed, cast off by a bull many springs ago, bleached by time and sun, now upturned and collecting rain in a shallow palm-like curve of antler.

It was slightly misshaped, gnawed at by small teeth and scorched in places from wild fire. Picking it up, I was surprised to feel how malleable it was, twisting beneath my grip—soft even, like a hardened sponge. Near it lay an old vertebrae, also burned over, which I crushed into pieces and finally dust, between my fingers and thumb, feeling strangely powerful.

This is what fire does. It reduces the size of things; it changes their color, their consistency and shape. It returns bones to the earth, and antlers and wood. It redistributes energies. Its flames open up pinecones, spreading their seeds—its ashes sprout morels. In the spring, when the cinders have cooled, toads will thrive. They will rally together, migrate short but expansive distances in exodus—crawling over one another, between the scattered yellow lilies that shine like a thousand stars on the hills of an ash black night. If we are lucky, on the other side of loss, there is often life. Go find it. Go now. •





## The Rust Fish, 4

will never leave this shale.  
Here they swim to the future  
while palm fronds gesture  
them forward. Tourists gape  
and wonder, snap their fingers,  
wish they could climb rock  
with axes to take these bones home.  
Scrapbook with fossil,  
flesh-mine the stone.  
The fish are indifferent, skeletal  
and staring in photos. How many millions  
of years ago were they down there  
in the bay, their slimy bodies  
still pulsing with tides, their eyes  
aware of light and dark,  
mouths open and tasting  
like children.

## The Rust Fish, 5

Maya Jewell Zeller

has had enough now. It's time  
that you all go home; he's tired  
and needs some water. See  
how his eyes let their pink show  
between cheek and lid. Hear  
that rasp as he tries to read you  
one more story. You know  
he'll keep going like this  
if we let him, rocking  
in that chair in the corner  
of the library, slow voice  
drowning his own dry ache,  
young ones minnowing  
the rug beneath him,  
words brining the air like salt.



# A Love Letter

Beth Raboin

Well, I admit it. I was nervous for our reunion. After all, it has been ten years. When we first met, those ten years ago, I was so young, only 19. What does a 19 year-old know? What more could I possibly know now?

Remember that first time I slept in your arms, how I walked all day with you to fill my every sense, only to discover as the sun sank low how separate I remain? How silly you must have found me, my pants with their tomato-sauce-supper-stains in a tree away from the bears. How silly I find myself, cowering pantsless in memory, a newcomer, an outsider, a greenhorn, unable to sleep for all the emotions of adventure. Silly maybe, but glad for it, and grateful, and wishing now that I could once again be as fresh and open to you as I was that first night.

It was a summer of firsts, my first summer romance in fact, and though it broke my heart, I left you in the fall. As I rode up over Logan Pass for the last time, not my first last time with you, I'd been counting the last times for weeks already, an early fall snowstorm, the first fall snowstorm, crept in. Before my eyes you turned white, and changed into something unrecognizable. What does a 19 year-old know? I knew then I would be back.

Now comes our ten year anniversary and unfathomably to me, your hundredth birthday. Now I am back.

Why did I come to our reunion harboring apprehension? Why did I stay away so long? Didn't I know you were the same beautiful place I left ten years ago?

In answer, I never meant to stray so far. In a small way, I blame you for my distance. Through our time together, I created my definition of beauty, and through all these years, I have sought what once I had with you. At first nothing measured up, no mountain reached as high, no sky gauged a purer blue. So, I wandered and I searched, but nothing felt like home. Nothing felt like what I felt with you.

Though it took many years your hold on me weakened, and I discovered that although you are a fine standard for beauty, you are not the only one. When I found the others, I also found it was too late. The wandering became me, and I could not stop. The quest for beauty is now as important as the beauty itself.

Beth Gibson



How did we come to this? Salad Girl, when I first met you, I was known as Salad Girl. I worked in the basement of a lodge, and spent my days cutting vegetables that are foreign to your soils. Each evening, my last task before I was set free to your nights, I mopped the floors where I had walked all day. Leave no trace, my eye.

At the time, I never questioned it, never questioned any of it. Remember how Clayton missed the ride in from Browning as often as not, and how Natasha would take his place at the sink, washing dishes for the rich man's lodge on the land her ancestors once called home? Remember the time she waved me over to show me her tooth that had fallen out into her hand, a hand not much older than my own? Remember the undercurrent of clues that told the tale of something remiss? I did not question the shadow cast by the dream that created you.

How could I? You served as the platform for my leap into the wild world of adulthood, or freedom, or discovery, or whatever those early days may be called. Back then the burden of big questions felt too heavy to carry with me. The questions were obstacles as obvious as your rugged peaks, and therefore as easy to avoid.

Still, in the years we have been apart, I have managed to run head-on into some mountains. In doing so, in recognition of the questions, I have come to see you in a new light. Glacier, you are a series of dichotomies—a construct of humanity disguised as a deeply wild place, a land of refuge and a land of exclusion, a picture of preservation and an illustration of loss.

I came back because I wanted to sort you out, to finally understand you. I wanted to answer the questions I was once too distracted to ask. Instead, when I spotted again your snow-capped peaks, the most I could do was gulp down a sigh. Sometimes, it turns out, the answers are also too big. I will never know you, not in the way I hope to know you. I may not even be able to forgive you, not fully. But I will always love you.

Remember the night in the beginning, when I could not tell the clouds from the sky, when I walked

down the middle of Highway 89 and with each step crested a new summit within you? Remember all the nights thereafter when I sang from your rooftops, your fields, and your forests, up through your valleys all the way to the stars? Remember the sunrise, when together with my friends (our friends) I refused sleep and instead drove up your spine on Going-to-the-Sun-Road to wait for dawn? Remember how the view was a gray blanket of fog? I thought I finally knew the meaning of disappointment, but you refused to teach that lesson. The sun rose.

You melted the fog and turned it into rainbows.

And so it is that I come back to you. I expect you to offer no less than magic, to clear my head of its confusions, to tender me reprise. If you could only speak to me you might say now,

"You come to me wanting, always wanting. When is it your turn to give?"

My heart sinks to the cold bottom of Lake MacDonald, because I fear I have let you down. I fear I have let you down, because I now have an answer to another of those questions I once forgot to ask. I know the parts of you that spawned your creation are dying. I have been watching your slow decay from far away, on television, in lecture halls, splayed across the glossy pages of magazines. The story goes you are melting, and it is unlikely this means only more rainbows.

Please forgive me for my failings. I do try. Each day I live my life with you in mind. I ask my friends to do the same. Will this be enough? I do not know, but I do know I am not unique in my love for you. Through 100 years and magnificently beyond in both directions there have been and will be people who love you.

Do you feel the raindrops that splash on my cheeks and in your waters on this first day of spring? For each raindrop count another person who loves you. Together, we can take heart in the raindrops.

It is my turn to give. Each raindrop says this, "It is my turn to give."

I am sorry I waited so long. •







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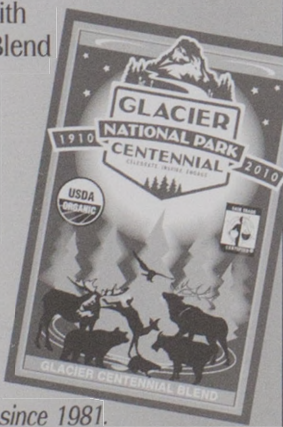
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